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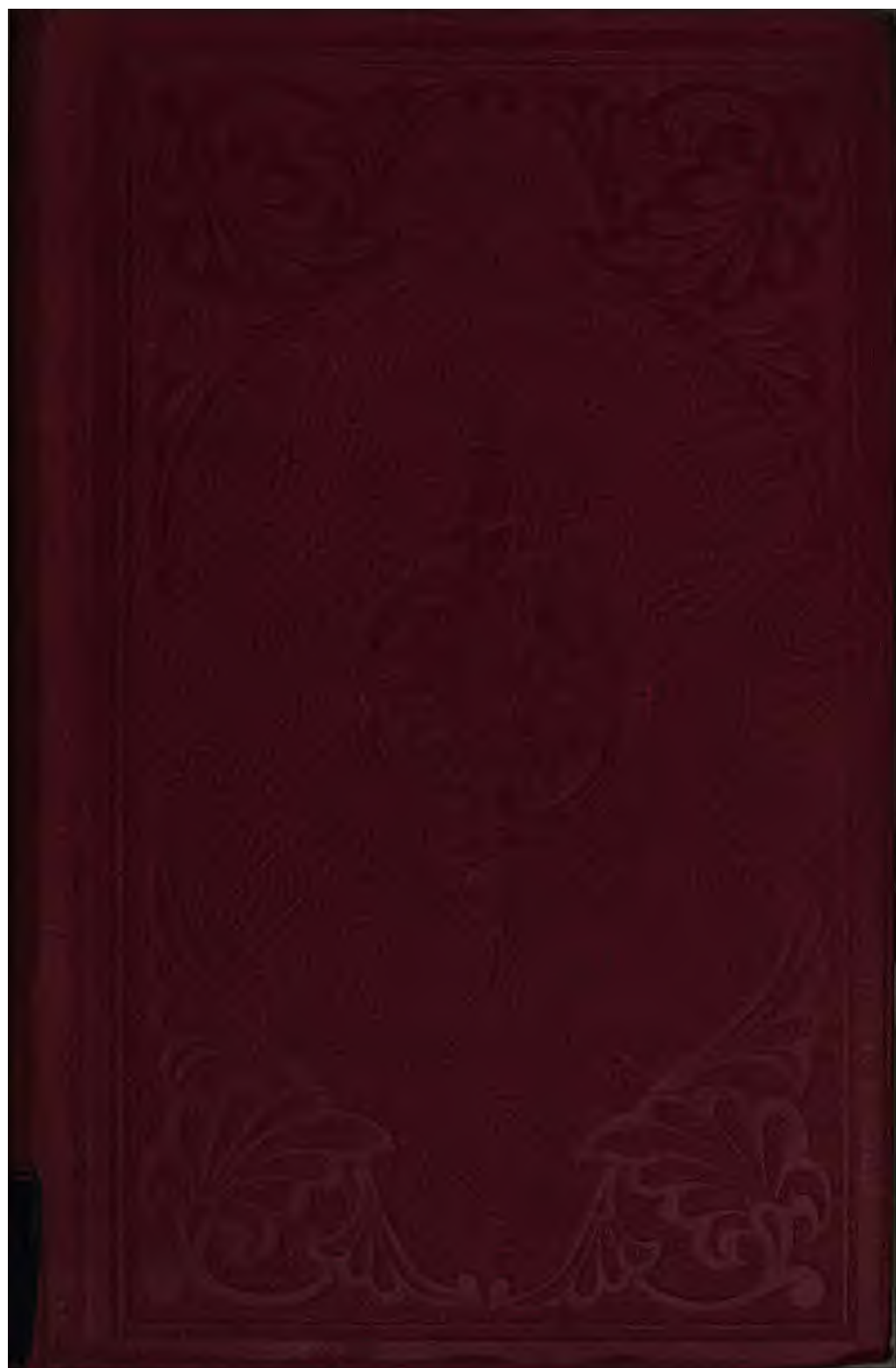
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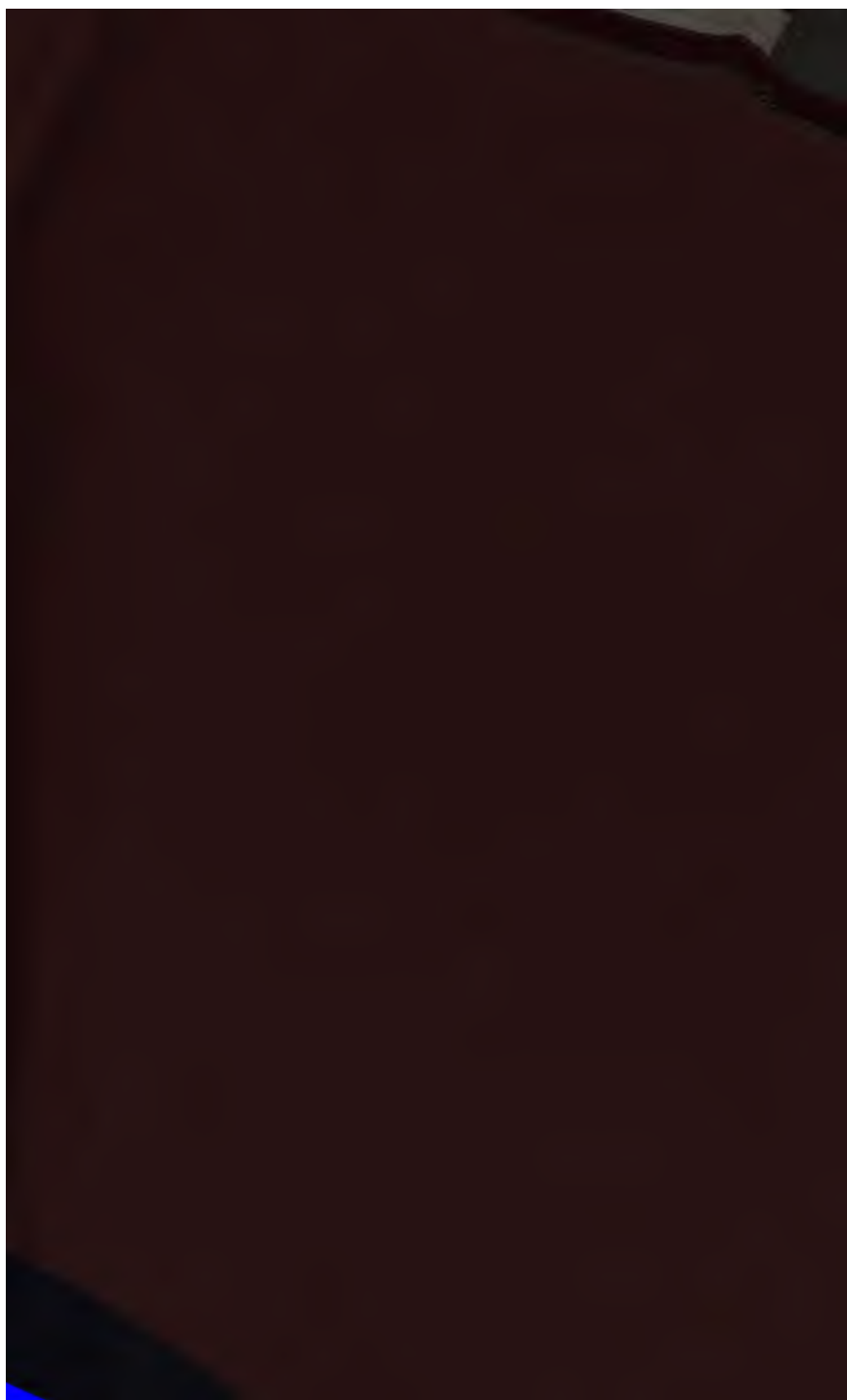
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1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for transparency and accountability, particularly in financial matters. The text outlines various methods for organizing and storing data, including digital databases and physical filing systems. It also mentions the need for regular audits and reviews to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the information.

2. The second part of the document focuses on the role of communication in achieving organizational goals. It highlights the importance of clear and concise communication, both internally and externally. The text provides guidelines for effective communication, such as using appropriate language, being open to feedback, and ensuring that all team members are informed and aligned. It also discusses the benefits of regular communication, such as improved collaboration and faster problem-solving.

3. The third part of the document addresses the challenges of managing a large and diverse team. It acknowledges that managing a large team can be a complex task, requiring a combination of leadership skills, communication, and organizational abilities. The text offers strategies for managing a large team, including delegating responsibilities, providing support and resources, and fostering a positive team culture. It also emphasizes the importance of monitoring team performance and making adjustments as needed.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the importance of innovation and creativity in driving organizational success. It argues that innovation is a key driver of growth and competitive advantage, and that organizations should encourage and support creative ideas and initiatives. The text provides examples of innovative practices and offers suggestions for how to foster a culture of innovation. It also mentions the importance of protecting intellectual property and ensuring that innovation is properly managed and implemented.

5. The fifth part of the document concludes by summarizing the key points discussed and offering final thoughts on the importance of these factors for organizational success. It reiterates that maintaining accurate records, effective communication, managing a large team, and fostering innovation are all essential for achieving long-term success. The text ends with a call to action, encouraging readers to apply these principles in their own organizations.

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BURTON ABBOTS.

BOOK III.—CHAPTER III.

A BATCH OF NEW RELATIONS.

“A good man's fortune may grow out at heels.”

SHAKESPEARE.

“If we commit small faults without regret to-day, we shall commit greater ones to-morrow.”

It was the twilight of one of the last days of October. Far and near a heavy mist was over the country, from the incessant rain which had fallen during the past week. Half the fields were under water; the ungarnered

corn stood in soaked, discoloured stooks ; the leaves fell in showers from the trees, and lay sodden and decaying in the cart-ruts, blending strong, unwholesome odours with the weighted atmosphere. The carriage passed slowly along the heavy roads, thick splashes of mud dashing up against the painted panels. We had been a long, circuitous journey from Burton Abbots and were now on our way between the Aislabeck station and Grinton Manor, the Armitages' place, whither we were bound for a short stay, preparatory to joining their party at York for the balls.

For some little time back we had been talking of this visit, and preparing for it, for Salome considered her own and Cecil's *coming out* an event of considerable importance, and we had had a French milliner down from London on purpose to make the dresses, and Mr. Scott had insisted on having Cecil's diamonds re-set. There were all sorts of pretty extravagances in those large portmanteaus which I had carefully counted on the Aislabeck platform.

I was leaning back in a corner of the carriage, revolving a mighty secret with which Cecil's guardian had entrusted me, while Cecil at my side closed her heavy eyes in thought rather than slumber. Salome kept up a constant flow of light, bantering conversation, now addressed to one, now the other, and repeatedly brushed the window tassel across the dulled glass, in order to look out and comment on what we were passing.

Few people would have given Mr. Scott the reputation of being a matchmaker, yet it was in that character that he had lately been working. By various harmless manoeuvres he had brought about an introduction between John Phillips and Lady Armitage, and had obtained for him an invitation to stay at Grinton during the period of our visit. At the very last moment he had written me word of the success of his plan, but forbidden me to mention the matter to either of the girls; he wished Cecil to have the surprise, and moreover believed she would be all the more

unrestrained and at her ease if she could attribute this meeting with John Phillips to merely a happy accident. So the consciousness of my secret kept me silently elated as we drew nearer our destination.

Grinton was by no means a large place, nor were the Armitages very wealthy people. We passed a pretty, low cottage lodge and a young larch plantation, and the house was straight before us, a straggling yellow-washed building, half covered with creepers; heavy framed windows perched here and there with the most picturesque irregularity. The beauty of the flower garden was over; we passed the wire fence with its pendent raindrops and the heavy glistening evergreens which were so tastefully disposed; but the little conservatory looked very bright with its many-coloured plants, and beyond it we could detect the yellow glow of firelight in the drawing-room windows.

The entrance was too small and narrow to be styled a hall, but it was cosy and well

lighted and enriched with some charming pieces of old oak furniture, and an abundance of crimson draperies. Our footsteps scarcely sounded along the thick corridor carpet as we followed the footman to the drawing-room. There was a small ante-room to this, rich drapery shrouding the glass door between the two apartments, through which, ere we entered, we could detect the woman's figure seated on the low chair by the hearth-rug, and the curly-haired child beside her, who was holding up painted pictures for her inspection.

At the first sound of the opening door Lady Armitage rose, and advanced to meet us with some cordial words of greeting. Her age might be five or six and thirty, and her face had a kind, truthful expression, which took one's fancy even more immediately than her well-cut features, soft hazel eyes and gentle mouth, pleasing though these were. She was tall and rather inclined to be stout, but she carried herself well, and her small

head was daintily set on her neck. Into the full blaze of the firelight on the hearthrug she drew her young kinswoman, holding Cecil's cold hands within hers, and chafing them tenderly. Cecil had not been well, and she looked cold and weary. Lady Armitage seemed with the first glance to know that she was so, and she drew the little chair closer to the fender, raised the coals till the yellow glow danced into every corner of the chamber, and ringing the bell desired the servant to bring some tea.

"Are you fond of children?" she asked, with a good-natured glance to Salome, who was half-shyly keeping in the back ground, and receiving a smiling answer, she went down on her knees by the hearthrug, gathered up the pictures and helped curly-headed Willy to find his feet, which were cramped by being doubled up in a tailor-like fashion.

"Go and show your pretty pictures to Miss Fielding," she said, with a kiss on the mottled bare shoulder, and the child investigated the

new acquaintance with a pair of widely-opened brown eyes which had a very grave and thoughtful expression, and finally determining that she looked harmless, consented to be lifted on to her knee, caressed and petted.

"Is that your youngest?" Cecil asked, after having during several silent moments reflected on the fittest topic of conversation.

"Oh! no," the mother answered in the proudest, fondest voice, "I've a baby upstairs not three months old. We are quite a large family, as you will see at dessert time, seven living," and the little breath with which she finished sounded uncommonly like a sigh. "We have company staying in the house," she went on, "a newly married cousin of my own and some odd gentlemen. They made up a riding expedition to see Atherbury Abbey this afternoon, and they have not yet returned."

Tea was brought in, and at the same opening of the door glided in a tall, rather plain

girl of twelve, who unconscious of our arrival had come on a message from the school-room. But in no way did she seem embarrassed by the discovery of our presence; she shook hands pleasantly with everyone, at her mother's desire distributed the tea and bread and butter, and when she went away took charge of little Willy, whose bed time was approaching.

Afterwards Lady Armitage showed us up to our rooms. Mine was the bed-room that opened into the dressing-room which had been prepared for Salome; Cecil had a chamber beyond. Justine was busily unpacking the evening dresses in Salome's room, and we all went and chattered together over Cecil's fire.

It was wonderful how quickly we found ourselves at our ease with Lady Armitage; there was such a homelike atmosphere about all she said and did; she was so womanly in her little offices, so genial and thoughtful in her attentions. When we came upstairs she pointed out the way to the school-room and

nursery, and smilingly closed the green baize passage door when the children's voices sounded too noisily. She put her arm affectionately round Cecil's waist, and hoped that she would not find the household of little ones worrying. "We are accustomed to it and so don't feel it," she said, honestly, "but I know that people unaccustomed to children often find them tiresome; you must cry out if they bother you. And they are all boys, except Margaret, which makes the matter so much worse, as my old nurse says, for boys will make a noise, the inclination is born and bred in them."

Lady Armitage left us to rest ourselves before dressing-time, and as was certain to occur, no sooner was she gone than we drew in our chairs and began to discuss *her*—her hair-dressing, the colour of her eyes, her voice, manner, toilette—depend upon it in fireside conclave very little escapes a woman's criticism. But we came to very agreeable conclusions on this occasion, and found little on

which to exercise our spinster fault-finding. Salome was charmed with curly-headed Willy, and Cecil seemed quite grateful to make such a promising discovery of relations. She and Lady Armitage had never met before, for until the previous year Sir Hugh had had an appointment which obliged him to reside abroad, and Grinton being let, his family had only visited England at intervals. His health had finally compelled him to resign his post, but he had done so with the more reluctance that his fortune was small and embarrassed, and he had a young and increasing family for whom to make provision.

His father had led an extravagant life, and it was greatly to the present Baronet's honour that though the estates were entailed, he had year by year forfeited the larger portion of his income to lessen the heavy amount of debt which his father had left behind him, and thus to remove the dishonourable stigma from his memory. But it was hard that his wife and children should have to pay the penalty

of another's sin, that their future should be taxed by the errors of the past. Little had the thoughtless, but by no means bad-hearted, old man, foreseen the care and sorrow he was bringing upon his descendants by the indulgence of his prodigal and unjust liberality. True, that his neighbours might once say and he delight to hear, how his establishment and table were unrivaled, his generosity without parallel, that he had never refused a request or turned a deaf ear to a friend; who remembered *that* or judged it reasonable matter for pride, when his creditors clamoured around his death-bed, and the cries of those he had ruined were heard demanding retribution and justice, when his noble-hearted son was compelled either to clog his own prospects in life, or to hear opprobrious epithets applied to the dead?

Sir Hugh had toiled through life as hardly as many a poor man has to toil; it was not until his health gave way and his medical advisers gravely assured him that only perfect

rest and retirement from business could afford any hope of ultimate restoration, that he came quickly back to the old house at Grinton, to end his days, as he said, in a patriarchal fashion, rearing and educating his large family and taking an active interest in the affairs of the country round. And the bells rang a welcome to his home-coming, and the villagers crowded to meet and draw his carriage through the village street; they all knew and revered his honest, struggling life, and gave credit to the right principle which had regulated his actions. No truly great or honourable conduct ever fails in its appreciation from the British poor.

Justine came into the room with Cecil's things, and bustled about the looking glass as though to hint to us the propriety of commencing our toilets. When Cecil and I took no notice of her insinuations she exercised a little nurse-like authority in carrying off Salome to have her hair done. She always considered Salome as her especial child and

charge. So it happened that Cecil and I were left alone, and were sitting over the fireplace with our dresses turned back and a great show of bright coloured petticoats, when the party came home from riding.

We heard a woman's voice on the landing; a low silvery peal of laughter; a man's answering tones; footsteps along the passage, close to the door; somebody calling "Mr. Phillips!" and John making answer in his clear, hearty voice.

Cecil started from her chair as if she had been shot and stood listening, whilst her face grew as white as a bit of paper. I could see how she trembled; I had not thought the surprise would have been such a shock to her, and I felt quite frightened when she staggered forward and nervously clutched the back of my chair.

I was always doing foolish, silly things under the idea of making her happier. I had hoped to enjoy her delighted surprise, yet instead of that I had almost rendered her unfit

to go downstairs at all. How could I forget that she was ill and weak and nervous, and in no state to be trifled with? I persuaded her to lie down on the bed, and brought her some salvolatile and water. The poor white eyelids were quivering, and her breath came hard and thick, as though she were sobbing. When she could speak she stretched out her hands towards me and said reproachfully:—

“Oh Mimi, why didn't you tell me?”

I sat down by her side and comforted her. I did not tell her about the *design* in the thing, for that would have vexed her, and would besides have betrayed good, well-meaning Mr. Scott; but I was obliged to admit that I had known he was coming, and to account for my silence by the desire to surprise her. She did not reproach me in words, but there was a very reproachful glance in her sorrowful, brown eyes, and she asked me with passionate entreaty to keep no more secrets from her about *him*, for she could not bear it.

The dressing-bell rang, and until Justine came I helped her; I needed little enough time for my own dressing.

I came in at the last to see how she looked, and put some finishing touches to her hair and dress. So smooth and glossy and silk-like the first looked, and the second was faultless in fit and make. Still for all that Cecil was even plainer than usual; past anxiety had thinned and paled her cheeks, and her eyes were heavy and had dark lines under them. The same excitement which brought such a rosy tinge to Salome's complexion rendered hers sallow and dusky.

The two girls went before me downstairs—Salome, with a light, tripping step, two little round dimples on her plump, white shoulders, and her fair hair all golden light and shadow. Cecil, tall, gaunt and stiff, intently fastening the buttons of her long gloves. She shrank back when she reached the ante-room door and let Salome open it.

On the hearth before the drawing-room fire

was a group of gentlemen. Sir Hugh, short, stout, and florid, the very opposite of the fine-looking man with military carriage whom I had expected to see. He came forward to greet Cecil, and she put out her hand and answered him, but her eyes were wandering forward, wandering to John Phillips, who, with heightened colour, and smiles of undoubted pleasure, was saying "how do you do?" to little Salome.

Sir Hugh kept Cecil engaged for some moments; he was asking about her journey, inquiring after Mr. Scott; then he was introducing that tall, middle-aged man with reddish sandy hair to her as Mr. Lushington; now the little fair man, with a very *retroussé* nose and an eye-glass, as Lord John Rayleigh; finally a dark clergyman, with hair and curled whiskers, which were strangely suspicious of black dye, and who had put delicate scent on his cambric handkerchief, as Mr. Desanges.

Cecil bowed to each, and Sir Hugh strove

to extend the same kind offices of introduction to Salome, only the laughing, pink-flushed child had turned her back on him, and was saying soft little nothings to John Phillips in the corner. I did not know they had known one another so well, or would care a rush about meeting. I went up and took off John's attention by shaking hands with him, and Sir Hugh worked his way round to Salome, and began over again about "Lord John," and Salome had to bend her naughty little head and curtsy lowly, looking as soft and gentle, and demure as a pretty maiden should look when she is on her best behaviour.

And then, Cecil close behind me, I found a remark about the weather for Mr. Lushington, and left *the two* to meet in the shadow. I did not mean to listen, but I could not help noting the restrained coldness in Cecil's tone, and the difficulty she found in keeping up any conversation with her companion. He seemed embarrassed too—evidently and unmistakably embarrassed. But I scarcely wondered

so much at that ; he had, no doubt, discovered his own secret by this time.

Lady Armitage followed us almost immediately, and with her came a stylish little lady, blonde and blue eyed, in extensive skirts of black moire, with white lace flounces, and some scarlet flowers in her hair and bosom. She was the bride, Mrs. Lushington, a mere girl by the side of that grizzled, middle-aged man. She had a little red mouth, and two rows of dazzling white teeth, which she displayed in talking and laughing. And she did a great deal in both those ways, keeping up a gay, bantering conversation with Lord John, using slang expressions in a soft, musical voice, and glancing up every now and then at her grave husband, as though to question the measure of his endurance.

Not once nor twice alone during that evening did I see him wrinkle his forehead, as he pored over the newly-arrived *Times*, or discussed politics with Sir Hugh, and his wife saw him as plainly as I did, and if a roguish glance failed

to provoke an answering smile, she would daringly appeal to him for corroboration of some ludicrous fact or impossible anecdote, related in the sweetest tones, and with a large amount of impudent assurance. She was a very amusing and irresistible little creature, but at least she was playing a dangerous game with that grave husband of hers, and I watched her with interest, and not a little apprehension.

If there is one thing a man never forgets and rarely forgives, it is being turned into ridicule by a woman. Perhaps little Mrs. Lushington would put her hand before my mouth if she heard me say so, and declare that she never intended to turn her husband into ridicule, it was only nonsense and she loved him very much. I have no doubt it was and that she did care for him with all wifely fondness, but she had a lively sense of the ludicrous, which she liked to indulge, sometimes, I fear, without much regard for the feelings of others. She was thoughtless and

had not very keen sensibilities herself; she was good-natured and didn't mind being laughed at; she didn't see why Roland shouldn't come in for his share, like everyone else, he laid himself unusually open to it, and it would be a good thing if she could laugh away some of his old bachelor eccentricities.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EVENING AT GRINTON MANOR.

"Adversity may suspend our fondness for life, but a single glance from prosperity soon recalls it."

"Providence has given us *hope* and *sleep* as a compensation for the many cares of life."

VOLTAIRE.

WE had music during the evening. Mrs. Lushington played and sang with more execution than feeling, and Lady Armitage treated us to some splendid operatic airs, perfectly rendered by a voice that was exquisitely pure and true, and had moreover been educated under the best Italian masters. I felt almost frightened when Salome went to the piano

after her ; I did not know how her soft, little voice would stand the trial of contrast. But my fear was groundless ; Salome selected an old, familiar melody, simple and graceful, and sang it as a bird might have sung, clearly, sweetly, and with a pathos that was irresistible. Sir Hugh was charmed and asked for song after song—old Scotch airs and Irish melodies, keeping her at the piano for nearly an hour, and starting with her one of those tremendous friendships that musical old men sometimes feel for pretty young singers, who take trouble to please them and listen patiently to their remarks.

But not alone on Sir Hugh did our little Salome make an impression. Lord John Rayleigh hovered round her all the evening, turning over the leaves of her music book, and in the intervals of the songs, making civil speeches to her in a voice which had a disagreeable lisp. He was a conceited little man ; I cannot say I admired him. I am not partial to men, who, in spite of well-sighted

eyes, disfigure themselves with an affectation of blindness, and fancy that the possession of an eye-glass gives them excuse to stare at all the pretty girls in a room. Lord John had evidently a high opinion of his own powers of fascination, and he minced his words, and curled his little, thin moustache, and looked as though he considered himself irresistible.

As to John Phillips, I could not make him out. When Salome first went to the piano, he followed her there, and remained leaning against the instrument, watching and listening to her for some time, even while there was a vacant seat by Cecil's side. When Lord John fairly appropriated the place at Salome's right hand, and Sir Hugh was in the midst of a hopelessly long conversation with her, he came back to the ottoman where I was sitting, and seating himself beside me, began to make inquiries about the Egertons and other old friends in the neighbourhood of the Abbots. I glanced backwards to where Cecil was sit-

ting, but the chair near her had been appropriated by Mr. Lushington, and to all appearance he and she were deep in a discussion of some mineral fossils. What a goose John had been to lose his opportunity!

He, too, looked round for a moment, and I caught his eye as it travelled back again. I smiled faintly, and I thought that his colour rose.

Salome had begun "Auld Robin Gray," and we sat silent for a few minutes. I was thinking of Cecil, and I was sure that John must be thinking of her, too. In the first pause I said to him in an undertone: "How do you think she is looking?" I referred to Cecil, of course.

● "More beautiful than ever," he said, enthusiastically, and when I looked up with a little surprise, I saw his eye was resting on Salome; "what an exquisite voice she has!"

I could scarcely refrain from a gesture of impatience; we were at cross-questions. But

perhaps it was a natural mistake after all; I had employed no nominative, and Salome's song was attracting general attention.

Mrs. Lushington and Mr. Desanges had been keeping up a very brisk flirtation ever since the gentlemen came from the dining-room. She, fluttering, foolish, little woman was now in a low, easy chair beside the fire—her wide skirts sweeping over the hearth rug, and a large fan of carved sandal-wood daintily swaying to and fro between her flushed cheeks and the fire—such a pretty, small hand it was that held that fan; numberless rings were on the tapered, white fingers, shining and glistening as they caught the light from the wax tapers above the mantle-piece.

Mr. Desanges was leaning over the back of a high chair, listening with very apparent reverence to the frothy conversation of his companion, a coffee-cup half raised to his lips, balanced between the thumb and first finger of his right hand, whilst the three remaining fingers were extended in the air like

the wings of birds. Mr. Desanges had this little peculiarity in handling things, I had remarked it during dinner; he never held his knife and fork like other people—but perhaps he thought he did so better than the rest of the world!

Lady Armitage had been upstairs to see her children in bed, and now as she returned she passed with a bow the chair which Mr. Desanges released and drew forward for her benefit, and took instead the vacant seat by my side, looking round with some pleasant remark to Cecil. Perhaps it was a goodnatured manœuvre on her part, to which she was impelled by the memory of some conversation she had had with Mr. Scott the last time she met him.

Cecil, of course, moved a little to one side as she answered her; she could not help coming forward and looking at the portfolio of photographs to which Lady Armitage was directing her attention, Then as by the purest accident, Lady Armitage appealed to

John, and John took the station on her other hand, what could follow so naturally as that Lady Armitage should discover how Mr. Lushington had been robbed of his companion, and that she should leave her seat and take that which Cecil had vacated, by this means leaving the two young people together with the small table and portfolio between them?

I tried to look innocent and unconscious, and to be very much interested in an album which I had taken from the table. I tried not to listen to the conversation that was going on at my right hand, but still I could not help it, every word and tone reached my ears with painful accuracy.

“Ah, that’s a view of York Minster, very good both as a photograph and a likeness of the place—won’t you sit down? there is a chair close behind you. Is that a good light for you?”

“Thank you,” murmured my darling, and

then again at intervals, "yes, very pretty, extremely like, thank you."

This was a curious way of testifying to their pleasure in meeting, I thought—but dear, dear, how incomprehensible young people are! I never had these pretences and misunderstandings in my day. Robert Hinchcliffe told me plainly out that he loved me, and asked me to be his wife, and just as plainly I gave him my answer. I never had a fear about him, and I am sure he never doubted me. We had plenty of obstacles to combat in the hard circumstances which forbade our immediate union; we had no need to quarrel amongst ourselves in order to make variety, as I have heard it said the young and happy will do sometimes in these days; we doubted our position, but never one another, oh never!

Now what in the world was there to prevent John Phillips loving Cecil and asking her to be his wife? What need stand in the

way of Cecil's marrying him and being made happy? not a lack of fortune, for she had plenty—not pride on his part or fear of the world's misconstruing his motive, for true love never admits self-interest, and a pure heart need apprehend no foul report when it has conscience for its defence—not a misgiving as to Mr. Scott's approbation of the suit—would he and I have thrown the young people in one another's way if we had disapproved the possible consequence of such intimacy? Could John be doubtful about the state of Cecil's own feelings and be constrained on that account? It was just possible that he might be so; Cecil was so very shy and reserved, and that cold manner of hers belied her really warm feelings; she knew the state of her own heart and she might instinctively shrink from John's prematurely learning the truth—but what silly young things he and she were! I could not help glancing up at them, and half-shrugging my shoulders with annoyance; why would Cecil look so stiff and

speak in such monosyllables—why did not John break through the ice? Really it was provoking of them!

Very slowly and listlessly I turned over the album leaves; I did not read a word or notice a picture, for all the time I was busily watching and thinking of the two children at my side.

Cecil was still standing in her old position, and again John attracted her attention to the chair he had drawn to the table for her:—

“Won’t you sit down?—you have had a long, tiring journey to-day.”

He was looking at her, I thought with scarcely concealed anxiety, and following the direction of his eye I saw how pale and ghastly the poor girl looked. She was over-fatigued and over-excited; the trouble and anxiety of the last few weeks had told upon her very much, and I did not wonder that John found a sad change in her since he had parted from us at Redcar.

“Perhaps you are tired of looking at

these," he said, "shall we finish them to-morrow?"

"Oh no, thank you," Cecil replied, putting out her hand for the print; "I am not really tired. I have only a little headache from my journey."

"You are feeling stronger than you did, though, are you not?" John inquired in a lower voice which had an accent of anxious solicitude, and he bent his head in almost loverlike fashion to await her answer.

Her face relaxed and grew softer. Poor thing, who knows how her heart might have been beating with sweet and secret gratification at that betrayal of John's interest in her? "Yes, much better, thank you, I hope soon to be quite well again." She looked a hundredfold brighter and better already.

He went on in the same meaning whisper: "I was so very sorry to hear of your being ill, so truly grieved to learn your trouble. The whole thing was so dreadful and unexpected, it must, indeed, have been a terrible

shock. I did not like to trouble you by writing, and I was sure you would know how I felt for and with you." He was referring to poor George Vivian's death, of course, but how very odd that he should have heard of Cecil's trial in that quarter; yet to what else could his allusion refer? My momentary surprise was dissipated by the sight of Cecil bending over the picture with tears in her eyes, and the earnest, sympathising glance with which John watched her. No one could see the two but I, for we sat in the corner of the room, no one else could hear what they said, for they spoke in undertones. But I thought I saw and read a vast deal in their few disjointed sentences. I thought I saw and read John Phillips's admiration and love for Cecil just as clearly as I interpreted the signs of her liking for him!

When we separated for the night, Lady Armitage accompanied Cecil to her room, and remained talking to her there for some time. Salome left open the door which separated

her chamber from mine, and chattered incessantly all the time we were undressing. She was in the highest and wildest spirits; she sang little snatches of song and made innocent jokes about the party downstairs, laughing at her own sallies far more than I felt inclined to laugh at them. She had detected the dye on Mr. Desanges's hair; she was sure that Mrs. Lushington's curls were false; she repeated Lord John's civil speeches and compliments with a joyous burst of merriment over each. She told how she liked her host and hostess, and how bent she was on making grave Mr. Lushington relax from his stateliness, and display more sympathy with his gay little wife.

Salome talked of everything and everyone save John Phillips, but his name she never mentioned, not even in allusion to other things. After all, her silence was not wonderful, for he was comparatively a stranger to her. Excepting during that short visit at Beaconfields, she had never seen him since

she was a child. I did not mention his name to her either, and certainly I never gave her a clue to his connection with Cecil. Salome was not the sort of person one would willingly make a confidante of, loving and tender-hearted as she was, she was so childish, so unthinking, such a stranger to sorrow !

When I heard Lady Armitage leave Cecil's room, I donned my dressing-gown, and hair-brush in hand, went to spend a last five minutes with my darling.

I found Justine in the act of unlacing Cecil's dress, and as we could not converse freely in the maid's presence, I sat myself down by the fire and brushed out my scanty grey hair, drawing it, Chinese fashion, from my face, and securing it behind in a meagre rat's-tailish looking plait. Then I remained patiently with my hands in my lap, and stared into the fire, revolving all sorts of plans in silence, until Cecil was ready to dismiss Justine and come and sit beside me.

Cecil combed out her hair for herself that

night ; she was doing it all the time we talked, and hers was such beautiful hair, dark and soft and glossy, falling quite to her waist, and so abundant that one hand could scarcely span the mass when she began to twist it up.

Poor girl—she was but in low spirits. For some time past, as I intimated before, she had been considerably out of health, and the excitement attendant on our stay at Redcar, and acquaintance with poor George Vivian, had been a strain on her from which she had not yet fully recovered. Dr. Holt said that we should do wisely to give her constant change of air and scene for some time to come, and our presence here, as well as our determination to accompany the Armitages to York, was in pursuance of his suggestion.

Cecil seemed disinclined for conversation, especially about John Phillips, but, like a foolish old woman, I would bring forward the subject and fancy she was only shy and in her heart all the while wished to hear about him. I repeated all the remarks he had

made to me, all the questions he had asked, all that he had told me of his own plans; how he was to be ordained on the Sunday after Christmas day and to go immediately to a small curacy in Dorsetshire, the incumbent of which, a friend of his father's, had long ago promised him a title for orders.

Cecil listened; brushing out her hair the while; but she asked no questions, and when I finished, there was a long uncomfortable silence which neither of us seemed inclined to break. At length I rose to go, and I put my arms round the child and kissed her. She took hold of my hand and held it between both of hers. I could not help whispering to her, "Are you not glad we came here, Cecil?"

She did not answer immediately, but she raised her eyes with a glance of enquiry—"Oh, Mimi, if I only knew?"

"What, dear?"

She looked at the red embers in the grate, and either their reflection or her own thoughts

threw a rosy hue over her features; "You know," she said.

"Oh, about John Phillips?" I answered out loud.

"Hush!" she exclaimed, nervously laying her hand on my arm, and glancing round at the door as though she feared our conversation might be overheard—poor, timid, modest child, she scarcely dare acknowledge her love even to her own heart, much less could she bear to hear it put into words by any one else!

"Nobody can hear," I said, softly, "and oh, Cecil, dear, I am sure all is right. I have not the slightest doubt about his caring for you; he looked so pleased to see you."

"He did not come near me for ever so long though!" she interrupted with a jealous accent.

"He did not like to do so, my dear; he was shy and he would not like to push himself forward without encouragement. You know, you are a more important personage in the

eyes of the world than he is, and he is anything but a self-opinionated young man. Now, don't be vexed with what I am going to say, Cecil dear, but I do wish you would try to be a little more cordial in your manner to him; you have no idea how cold are; and if you throw him back on himself you cannot wonder if he takes fright and thinks you do not care about him."

She listened to me silently, without the protest I had expected; perhaps she scarcely heard all I said and was herself thinking of something else, for she looked up quickly when my voice ceased, and asked, while the old wrinkle which told of mental strife, came to her forehead,

"Did anything strike you as the least odd to-night?"

I reflected for a moment, but nothing had—no, I could explain everything to myself now, and I said so, asking her, however, to what she had referred.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," she said, "I dare-

say it was only my fancy. Then, Mimi, I must ask you, you don't think I am deceiving myself and others, you think that John, that John—"

"Yes, undoubtedly I do think that John Phillips loves you truly and sincerely, for your individual self, as I should wish my dear Cecil's future husband to love her. There, are you convinced at last? I believe you never will be till John tells you so himself."

She smiled very sweetly; my words seemed to bring a momentary happiness to her.

"Well, Mimi, I shall try and think as you do. I hope I am not doing wrong, but," and her face flushed, "one is sorely tempted to believe what one wishes may be true. You see I am placing reliance on your judgment rather than on my own."

"You may safely do so, I feel so sure I am right. Oh, I know you'll be happy, Cecil, I am as certain John cares for you, as if he had told me so himself."

I spoke confidently and left the room immediately afterwards, very happy at heart, because I fancied that I had done good to Cecil, that I had made her see the truth at last—oh, me, what was the truth? What fearful evil I did under the impression of working for the best. I thought I was a clever, experienced old woman; I flattered and cajoled myself, as I had done many a time before in my life, but—well, I must go on with my story, and, Reader, you will learn by my confessions what a wrong estimate I had of myself, and my own discrimination. Only, if you be a mother, or chaperone, if you have aught to do with young people and their love affairs, listen to the warning of an old woman who herself made a mistake,—don't mar love affairs, for that were an act of barbarous cruelty; but also *don't try to make them*, it is the greatest mistake in the universe and leads to the utmost misery.

Let young people manage their own matters

in their own way ; their hearts and a good Providence will serve them in better stead than would do your manœuvres and worldly counsels. You know that old saying about marriages being made in Heaven ! There is more truth in it than you think !

CHAPTER V.

THAT GIDDY LITTLE SALOME.

"The bloom of op'ning flowers' unsullied beauty,
Softness and sweetest innocence she wears,
And looks like nature in the world's first spring."

Rowe.

"Joyous as morning,
Thou art laughing and scorning."

Wordsworth.

CECIL came down to breakfast the next morning with a bad headache. She told me she had had a sleepless night with pain, and her sallow face and heavy eyes were too tell-tale not to awake enquiries and commiseration, neither of which were very much to her taste. She rarely complained, even at home, and

now she answered Lady Armitage's motherly suggestions so shyly and shortly, that I was half afraid she might be accounted ungracious, and, therefore, hastened to her rescue, throwing all the blame of her pale cheeks on yesterday's journey and fatigue.

Salome had fluttered downstairs, fresh as a lark, and rosy as a summer flower; her yellow hair arranged with that artful simplicity which Justine knew to be so very becoming to her. There was not a shadow on her face, nor a trace of fatigue in one of her attitudes, she had slept the calm, happy sleep of a child, and had come down refreshed, intent on pleasure and enjoyment. I do not wonder that Sir Hugh looked up from his business letters with a brightening face when she flitted into the room, asking, in that soft little voice of hers, if there was not a letter for her, and pouting out her rosy lips with disappointment on being answered in the negative.

She pretended a great deal of surprise and

disappointment, so much so that I felt astonished, and wondered from whom she could have expected such an important document, and Lord John listened to her regrets with evident interest, and it may be some unpleasant conjectures. Mr. Lushington began to explain how our letters could scarcely have been forwarded from Burton Abbots yet, had they been sent there in the first instance, and Sir Hugh made a facetious remark to Salome in an undertone, which she received with a very becoming blush, and a put-on air of dignity and displeasure, that made me laugh in spite of myself.

But I could not help feeling vexed and surprised with her; to be sure, I had never been much in society with her and for more than two months lately she had been quite away from my wing, and with gay people, very gay herself, no doubt. But I was an old-fashioned woman, my own bringing up had been grave and decorous, and Cecil was so very sedate

and steady, that in being with her, I had not learnt to make much allowance for the exuberance of youthful spirits.

Hitherto I had always looked upon Salome as a child, and thus accounted for her high spirits and playful ways; but now she was nearly eighteen, and *come out*, I thought she would grow more demure and dignified, as a natural consequence of her advance to womanhood. I did not expect she would bring all her old kittenish, frolicsome ways into play when she was out visiting, and amongst Cecil's grand relations too!

Salome seemed destined to give me no end of heart-burnings during this visit. I never saw such a child. Had she been anybody else I should have declared that she flirted abominably; but I could not and would not say so of her—I could not bear that one of my children should be said to *flirt*. Aye, laugh at me for a maudlin old woman, as you will, dear young lady of the present day. I know my ideas may be said to be old fashioned, but

I flatter myself that they are somehow in accordance with true right, and feminine modesty, and it is no affectation on my part when I say that, however put, however pronounced, that word *flirtation* is as odious to me as a nasty smell, a bad taste, or anything that jars upon one's senses.

This being the case it may easily be imagined what a constant source of annoyance to me were Salome's little pert ways and sayings, the very ring of her musical voice when she laughed at Lord John's complimentary speeches, the badinage with Sir Hugh, her repartee with Mrs. Lushington, her endurance of Mr. Desanges' prosy conversations, pursued in an undertone, worse than all her *tête-à-tête* and nonsense talkings with John Phillips. Everybody else laughed at her, and petted, and admired her, and every now and then I could not help laughing too, and sometimes in my heart I was rather proud of her.

But I did frown at her, and cast warning glances when she was getting too noisy, and I

did take her upstairs more than once and read lectures on decorum to her, and on one occasion I brought her to tears about some trifle or another, when, of course, I was extremely sorry and kissed and fondled her and reproached myself for being a hard-hearted tyrant.

Well, just now Salome was attracting everybody's attention, and claiming the lion's share of conversation and notice. She had so much to say, and all were so intent on listening to her, that I had not an opportunity of bringing in a word to ask from whom she was expecting this important letter, which otherwise I should most assuredly have done. Not until the other rival queen, Mrs. Lushington, came down in a resplendent toilette and everybody had to shake hands with her and bid good-morning, did I succeed in drawing Salome into the embrasure of the window and asking about the letter.

There stood the child in the sunlight, waiting for what I had to say, and looking so

pretty and innocent that it went to my heart to scold her. She played with her watch-chain, and looked up to my face with such a roguish little glance, "Well, Mimi?"

My eye had been travelling over her pretty new dress, and the still prettier figure which it became so well; what an art Justine had for creating effects out of bits of ribbon and tulle and lace, that blue silk would have been nothing without its trimmings, without those multitudinous little flounces, and the fluttering white sleeves and things. I don't know how it was but Justine always made Salome's dresses look twice as well as Cecil's, and yet they were nearly always pin for pin the same in material.

"Well, Mimi?" repeated Salome, who did not at all appreciate this "durance vile," though she was in the sunniest spot in the room, and there was a lovely prospect from the window. "I thought you wanted me, Mimi?"

"So I do, dear, I want to know about this

letter—are you really disappointed not to get it?”

“What letter?” and the question was put with an air of most sweet and unconscious innocence.

“Why, the letter you were making such a fuss about not a minute ago;” the asperity of my tone must have made a fine contrast for Salome’s soft voice.

“Oh! the letter I wanted, you mean? Yes, is it not a pity I did not get it?”

Did anybody ever meet with such an aggravating little being? And she was watching me all the while with a demure smile on her face, and mischief twinkling under her long eye-lashes; she always delighted in teasing me.

“I did not know you had any such important correspondents,” I said acidly; and I went on, “Who did you expect to hear from?”

I hardly anticipated that she would tell me, but she did, with a face of mock penitence,

and lowering her voice as though the communication demanded privacy: "I thought I should hear from Jane Corbyn, perhaps!"

I could have shaken the child! Had she made all this fuss about a letter from Jane Corbyn, that she had expected for the last fortnight at least? I was almost indignant, and Salome actually had the impertinence to look up at me, and, catching the expression of my countenance, to laugh, laugh out loud, and at me!

"Really, Salome, I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself," I said. "It is anything but ladylike to put yourself forward in this way—and—and—"

"What, Mimi, dear?"

"Well, and attract people's attention! Did you not make everybody speak and think about your letter, and a silly, nonsense letter from Jane Corbyn too, that you did not expect any more than I did. Do be quieter, you must remember we are not at home now, and you are no longer a child."

"Oh! Mimi, don't be cross, it makes you look so ugly!" Salome exclaimed aloud, putting up her hands as though to ward off a lecture; "do be your own dear, good-tempered self; don't scold!"

"Who is not to scold?" asked a manly voice at my side.

It was John Phillips, and Salome dropped her hands with a woe-begone blush, and I looked foolish. Salome was the first to rally. She turned to John with that pretty, coaxing way of hers: "Mimi's been giving me such a lecture on decorum, Mr. Phillips, I am sure I don't require it, do I? Am not I very good and proper sometimes? Did I not behave like a good girl when I was away?—oh! Mr. Phillips, won't you take my part?"

John's answering smile was sufficiently encouraging, but somehow it took Salome aback. She broke off suddenly and became intent on looking at the view. When I glanced up at her face I saw that she had coloured crimson.

A moment before I had been annoyed with

her for involving a stranger in our little discussion; when I say a stranger, I mean John Phillips just now, because to Salome he was almost a stranger, and somehow he was the very last person I should have chosen to second my good advice to a pretty, wilful, little girl like this; I should have been frightened that he might judge Cecil by her half-sister's standard, and in my eyes Cecil was so much better in all respects, such a much finer character altogether. Besides, one gives children little hints in private which one would not care to have repeated at the Market-cross, and in the present instance when my warning to Salome immediately referred to John Phillips himself, as well as to the other gentlemen, it was very unpleasant, to say the least of it, for her to go and tell him about it. It was worse than childish of her; I did not wonder that she blushed when she realized what she had done—for my part I blushed for her!

“The servants are coming in to prayers,

Miss White," John Phillips said, suddenly attracting my attention, and I had only just time to recall Salome from her reverie and kneel down before Sir Hugh began to read.

Our party had been augmented by the arrival of Margaret Armitage and several of her little brothers, under the escort of a pleasant-looking young lady, whom Lady Armitage introduced to us afterwards as her children's governess.

Besides two boys at school and the baby in the nursery, here were three rosy-faced little urchins, one still wearing the nursery attributes of frock and pinafore, who knelt down by his mother's chair and wanted her promptings in the "Our Father."

The children remained in the dining-room for a few minutes, making a good deal of noise, and seeming on the most happy terms with their parents. Of course Mrs. Lushington made a great fuss with the youngest boy, and put him on her lap and praised his pretty

curly hair and brown eyes, for his mamma's benefit; and Salome won the heart of his brother by admiring the new whistle he brought out of his pocket. I scarcely know which Charlie ended with liking best, his new whistle or the *jolly* young lady who played with him so good-naturedly. So far as his juvenile capabilities permitted it he was half in love with Salome's pink cheeks and laughing blue eyes even in that first interview, and as to Salome herself she petted and encouraged him, and let him pull about her rings and chains, and even promised to come out some time in the course of the morning and see his new pony. I verily believe that girl could not help being popular wherever she went, and asking and winning love, even from a child!

Margaret Armitage stood talking to Cecil for the few minutes before she rejoined her governess in the school-room. I was quite pleased to see how nicely the two got on together. Twelve-year-old Margaret was so

simple and unaffected, so unassuming, and yet so great an authority with her little brothers that it was really a pleasure to be with her and them. I saw that Cecil liked her, and perhaps my own appreciation of her was not lessened by that fact. I could be almost grateful to her for talking to my darling, and by her happy enthusiastic girlishness bringing that quiet smile to Cecil's lips.

But the door closed upon the children at last, and breakfast began in right earnest—the tea and coffee making at the alternate ends of the table, and servants gliding about and handing the things, and one's next neighbours making little civil remarks to one from time to time, either about the weather, or the neighbouring scenery, or perhaps the approaching gaieties at York.

Cecil sat close to Sir Hugh, and I heard them conversing amicably together, but my chief attention was directed to Salome, who sat immediately opposite to me and talked incessantly to Lord John Rayleigh. Mrs.

Lushington was engaged in conversation with Mr. Desanges who was stationed at Lady Armitage's right hand.

What a child Salome was ! She seemed as happy and as much at home here as she could have been at Burton Abbots ; she talked and laughed and made mischievous remarks all breakfast time. If she had not had such a sweet low voice and so musical a laugh I should have been quite ashamed of her ! As it was I began to reflect on those Corbyn relations of hers for bringing her too much forward, and encouraging her in giddiness and — well, nothing else will express it—in a love of flirtation ! I was sure Salome would never have been like this had she not been those two months from under my wing ; at least I thought not. But thinking over the matter did not increase my assurance, for I presently recalled the little episode of Captain Leopold's admiration for her, as well as poor Charlie's simple and honest love, and I did not feel quite pleased or satisfied with my

charge. I was afraid that evil tendency to flirtation must be innate in her !

Breakfast was nearly at an end when some one attracted my attention to a handsome Normandy cat which was basking in the sun on the ledge of the bow-window. Cecil was asking Sir Hugh where he got it, and I fancied that in answering her a momentary shadow crept over his face. The cat, he said, was a great favourite with all his children, and very much petted. He rose as he spoke, filled a saucer with milk, and opening the sash, called the cat in to lap it. The creature seemed well accustomed to the indulgence, and rubbed itself fondly against its master's hands as he stooped down to remove the empty saucer.

"It seems quite at home," I overheard Cecil say ; "do you feed it every morning?"

"Yes," Sir Hugh replied in an undertone, "it comes naturally to the window when we are at breakfast, and waits to be let in. You're

a great pet, are you not, Lillie?" and he patted its downy ears.

Later in the day I had that little episode with the cat recalled to my memory. I had gone to pay Miss Royston a visit in her schoolroom after the morning lessons were over. I had been very much interested in my new acquaintance, and the sincere affection which she evinced in speaking of her little charges and their parents. She had been with the Armitages for several years; they had engaged her when they were living abroad; and, herself an orphan, she had experienced home-like kindness at their hands. She told me what a good, kind-hearted girl was Margaret Armitage, how likely to prove a useful woman and a comfort to her parents; also how much these last thought of her, and no wonder! for she was their only daughter! There had been another girl once; Miss Royston's voice slightly quavered when she mentioned her; but she had died

when she was a little toddling thing, only just beginning to learn her letters, full of funny ways and lisping little speeches. She had been a great favourite with her father, and he had taken her death very much to heart.

"Ally used to have a pet kitten, poor little child," Miss Royston went on, "and when she died Sir Hugh took it under his especial charge, and tended and fed it just as carefully as ever did little Ally herself. He brought it over to England with him, and it regularly waits to be fed every morning when he is at breakfast."

I thought with a softened feeling of the petted Normandy cat, and also I remembered the little low sigh with which Lady Armistage had yesterday replied to Cecil's inquiry about her children—she had seven living!

She did not forget the *eighth*, whose span-long grave was thousands and thousands of miles away! Perhaps mothers never can forget the little, short, sunshiny lives which rise and fade away before their own, which

are so soon forgotten by all the rest of the world. Mothers, maybe, see the once bright little faces over and over again, in ways and seasons of which we little wot, in dreams and reveries, through the smiles of little stranger children, in sweet glances and soft tones which strike some chord in their hearts, and rear up tender visions of those whose angels do always behold the face of our Father which is in Heaven !

A little child's memory has indeed a rare fragrance. Even Miss Royston's tones melted when she reverted to "Ally," and when I expressed my sympathy for her, she took from her workbox a broken painted figure, such as one sees in a child's Noah's ark. She was treasuring it up carefully because, long ago, in a moment of childish generosity, little Ally had slipped it amid her work ; it had been one of the child's treasures. Long after Ally's death Miss Royston had come upon that painted figure at the bottom of her workbox, and had sorrowfully remembered when and

how it had been given to her. Now she put it away carefully amid folds of silver paper !

Cecil was in her own room the greater part of the morning ; I had persuaded her to lie down, and try by rest to ward off a bad headache. Salome was down in the drawing-room, and the once or twice that I went thither, I found her enjoying herself immensely, and making great friends with everybody. When school-room hours were over, little Charlie came to claim her promise of visiting his pony, and, as you may be sure, he and she did not go out alone. The suggestion of a walk pleased everybody, Mrs. Lushington wondered that she had never before discovered what a lovely day it was, and she was "so fond of horses, Sir Hugh must take her through his stables." As I passed upstairs to Cecil's room, I looked through the passage window, and saw the group in the courtyard.

There was Mrs. Lushington, with her dress tucked up over a very short and very bright

petticoat, showing to advantage a pair of remarkably neat ancles. A little black hat with a scarlet feather, was placed jauntily on her head, and one hand was in the pocket of her seal-skin jacket. Salome told me afterwards how fearlessly Mrs. Lushington went up to the horses in their boxes, and patted and admired them, how recklessly she put herself within reach of their hoofs, and turned into ridicule Sir Hugh's good-humoured remonstrances and her husband's more strongly worded reproof; how she had become more and more venturesome when she discovered that her companions were alarmed, and at last was forcibly drawn back by her husband, whose gesture of alarm and tightened grasp had not been entirely a joke, though little Mrs. Lushington laughed, and tried hard to make out that they were so.

Sir Hugh said something about a ride in the afternoon, and Mrs. Lushington seized on the idea with avidity.

"Oh, yes, they would ride; she liked riding

so much, could Sir Hugh mount her again? She should like to try the paces of that grey immensely."

The groom who was standing at the horse's head, ventured to remark that the animal was skittish, and unaccustomed to be ridden by a lady.

Little Mrs. Lushington rattled on without paying any regard to what he said.

"I like to ride an animal that has some spirit, Sir Hugh; I am to have the grey, am not I?"

"I think I have a more suitable horse for a lady in the next stable, Mrs. Lushington, or you can have the one you rode yesterday. I don't think your husband would like to see you on the grey."

"Oh, I am not the least afraid; I have been accustomed to riding all my life. I used to go out with the hounds when I was at home. I did indeed, Roland."

This last was an aside to her husband, who unwilling to contradict her in public, was yet

lifting his hand in mute appeal. Did he not remember well enough the quiet rides of her maiden days, when her stepmother kept her in so tightly, and would as soon have allowed her to ride a steeple-chase, as to show off her horsemanship at the meet? Perhaps Mr. Lushington thought with a sigh of those halcyon days before his marriage, when he used to ride down the shady Warwickshire lanes with Alleyne Burns, the groom at a respectful distance behind; when, happy time, Alleyne did not judge his slow, pompous style of conversation a bore, was too shy to turn him into ridicule, and blushed a great deal when he looked at her.

Who would have thought that pretty, retiring young girl, would so soon be changed into this flirting, wilful little woman, who was so very fond of society, and dress, and admiration, and all the other naughty things from which she had been so strictly debarred in her girlhood?

When Salome told me the story I thought

I had such an excellent opportunity for pointing a moral against giddiness and wilfulness. I bade her take warning from Mrs. Lushington, and beware, lest she also should one of these days become a flirting, careless little wife.

"There's no fear of that yet," said Salome, and her smile scarcely redeemed the pertness of the speech; "and there never will be!"

"Take care, my dear, people don't know themselves, and you really are inclined to be too fond of gaiety and admiration."

"Perhaps," with a pout of her lips, "but I never would marry a man like Mr. Lushington."

"That does not, however, excuse or account for his wife's conduct."

"Doesn't it?" archly, "but I am sure it does. If Mr. Lushington were half what he should be his wife would not venture to try him so. She has the upper-hand already, and she does not care a straw for what he says.

I don't believe he dare attempt to keep her in order, or at least, he's not tried it yet."

Upon my word this was an unexpected view of the case from Salome. I could scarcely resist smiling as I said: "Then you had rather have a husband who would keep you in order, Salome?"

"Of course," she said, turning away her face that I might not detect her confusion, and by so doing giving me an uncomfortable impression that she had some *beau idéal* in her mind's eye, whom she deemed capable of maintaining this proper authority. How quickly I ran over the names of every gentleman she had mentioned as having met, when she was in the south! But all in vain!

"Then we must look out for this very exemplary and determined husband for you, my dear," I said, with an attempt at raillery.

She pulled her hand rather ungraciously away from my grasp.

"Thank you, Mimi, but I won't trouble

you. I like to chose for myself. And—and—perhaps—very likely I shall never marry at all.”

“That is very likely,” I said, in a snappish voice, for I was offended. I am rather a *touchy* person as no doubt my Readers have already discovered.

Salome looked round and laughed, and my ill-humour vanished: “Yes, seriously I mean it, unless indeed,” with an air of resignation, “I marry Lord John Rayleigh. You can’t think what friends we are, he has just been telling me that he shall never forget his visit here as long as he lives, he never was so happy in his life before. I forget how it all came out, but it was something in connection with the scenery; I think I asked him if he didn’t admire it, and he tacked his regrets to the answer. And then he proceeded to tell me that his house was nearly as beautifully situated as this, but he rarely went there, it was so lonely now all his sisters were

married. Mrs. Lushington overheard him and mischievously advised him to look out for a wife."

Salome was watching me, with an evident mischievous desire to see how I received her communication. I did not answer her immediately, for I was trying to remember all I had heard about Lord John, and what conclusions I had come to about him. No, certainly I did not like him, and I began to think too that Salome must have gone considerable lengths with him when he made such devoted speeches to her after only twenty-four hours' acquaintance. I was not altogether pleased with the child.

"Shouldn't you like to see me Lady John, Mimi?" Salome said, provokingly; "I should be such a grand body in those days—Think! I might eventually be a duchess, for Mrs. Lushington says that Lord John's brother is a great invalid and unmarried; wouldn't you be proud of me then?" and Salome pirouetted

round before me, casting a not very uncomplacent glance at her own reflection in the tall looking glass.

"No, my dear," I said, hotly, "I should be extremely ashamed of you. I am sure if you married him it could only be for his title and his money. You'd be bought, Salome; I wonder you dare speak of such a thing."

"Mimi, you're unjust to the poor man, he is so good; he told me he was almost ruined by having to head all the subscription lists in the parish where he lives. And he is so domestic. He sat at my elbow nearly all the morning, watching the progress of my embroidery, and asking me why I cut out holes to sew them up again—those sorts of little questions display such an innocent mind, don't they? And, Mimi dear, haven't you noticed the red tint in his whiskers? He is evidently of an ardent and enthusiastic nature, he would be able to appreciate me warmly; and he would have just sufficient temper to keep me in order; people with those long, sharp *retroussé* noses

are apt to be sharp-tempered, let alone his thin lips. Oh! he is just the person for me, I'm convinced."

I saw she was in fun, at least I was willing to hope she was, but I never approve of these sorts of jokes; I think they are in such extremely bad taste. I took care therefore to mark my displeasure by turning away from her and advising her to go and prepare for luncheon.

But Salome was not to be so put off. She came and thrust her arms round my neck, saying in that irresistibly coaxing way of hers:—

"The old Mimi's not offended, is she? she should not take everything one says for gospel, and she oughtn't to bear malice. Come, Mimi, give me a kiss, I don't like to see you look so grim—and there, I promise you to try and be a better girl. I really won't flirt, if I can help it. And I won't sit next to Lord John at luncheon if there's another vacant seat; you shall see what a demure young

woman I can be. It really wasn't my fault. I can't help people being civil to me."

Oh, Miss Salome, but there was a little accent of self-conceit in that conclusion! After all, it was only natural that the pretty little head should be turned by the adulation it received.

I kissed the child and gave her one or two trite maxims which she received in good part, and to do her justice I must say she was very good and quiet during luncheon. I scarcely heard her voice at all, for she was sitting beside John Phillips, and he and she conversed in an undertone, without any of Salome's customary bursts of merriment. I cannot say how she behaved herself during the rest of the afternoon, for she made one of the riding-party, and only got home in time to dress for dinner, at which we were to meet some of the neighbouring gentry. And in the evening, she was so much occupied at the piano, where I was pleased to see Sir Hugh had taken up his old station, that she had little

opportunity for flirtation, added to which an honorable Miss Somebody with a hooked nose had engrossed Lord John's attention, and was keeping him tightly chained to her side while she discussed the sayings or doings of everybody last season in London, where it seemed that these two had met before.

"There's an amusing little flirtation going on over there," Mrs. Lushington said to me with a knowing smile, designating with her fan the sofa on which Lord John and his honourable acquaintance were pursuing their reminiscences, "it is rather amusing to watch, is it not?" and she sank back in an arm-chair and admired the effects of her skirts, which had settled themselves around her in most extensive and picturesque confusion.

For once in my life I felt a friendly feeling towards that pretty, little woman and could have given her a cordial shake of the hand. I watched the little affair she had pointed out to me with immense interest, and really thought that honourable young lady was very

prepossessing-looking—hadn't she relieved my mind for me?

And if I had a momentary apprehension as to how Salome might take it all, I was perfectly reassured by a glance towards the piano, where she was looking as happy and contented as a pleased child, dealing out as sweet smiles and as soft little speeches to a shy young officer who was one of the dinner visitors, and whom she had never before seen, as ever she had done to Lord John himself.

CHAPTER VI.

I GIVE JOHN PHILLIPS A HINT.

"'Tis with our judgments as our watches ; none
Are just alike, yet each believes his own."

POPE.

" When you doubt, abstain."

ZOROASTER.

" What is it that I should turn to, lighting upon days like
these!

Every door is barr'd with gold, and opens but to golden
keys! "

TENNYSON.

I WAS keeping my mind quite easy about Cecil and John Phillips. I thought that everything was going on as nicely as possible. He did not pay her any particular attention, but that of course was natural enough, for his good taste would make him shun anything that

could attract attention to her whom he loved.

He and I had some conversation about the sad circumstances of our stay at Redcar, and I was much pleased by the feeling way in which he reverted to poor George Vivian, and spoke of his high and admirable qualities. John was evidently unaware of the painful revelations which had come to Cecil's ears through the cruelty and cowardice of Captain Vivian, and without her permission I could not tell him anything about the matter. He evidently believed that George Vivian's untimely death had been the cause of this great shock to Cecil's nerves, and he more than once alluded anxiously to her delicate health. I noticed with pleasure how unobtrusively attentive he was to her comfort, how careful he was that she should avoid cold, or damp, or over-fatigue. I often detected him glancing at her eagerly, as though to assure himself that she was not tired, or headachy, or out of spirits, and when he spoke to her it

was with such evident and respectful admiration that I could not help liking him more and more. On first meeting her he had been shy and constrained, but that soon passed off, and he found pleasure in resuming with her his old discussions on books, politics, or pictures, just as he used to do in the early Autumn.

Cecil did not readily make friends with the other members of the party. There was no point of sympathy between her and little Mrs. Lushington, and Lord John was not at the trouble of speaking much to a plain-looking girl, however large her fortune, though he evidently enjoyed a flirtation with Salome. Mr. Lushington was too prosy to be an amusing companion, and, besides, he was not much given to conversation with ladies. Only Mr. Desanges, for a day or two, deserted the pretty, young bride, and affected the society of the heiress; but somehow Cecil led him so quickly and so plainly to understand that his attentions were disagreeable to her that

he soon relapsed into his old place, and resumed his old civil speeches and flattering homage to Mr. Lushington's wife. And she, for her part, did not seem to take his temporary defalcation to heart; she joked and laughed with and at him, sometimes bantering him unmercifully, always charming him with her lively remarks and good spirits; flattering him by occasional betrayal of interest in his affairs, and by references to his opinion and judgment that I did not think the wisest proceeding in the world, only it is not my place to judge her, and, to do her justice, I believe she was without a thought of evil.

Cecil got on best of all with her kinswoman. Perhaps the tie of blood drew them together. At any rate Lady Armitage took to Cecil as readily as did her children, and many a pleasant hour they spent together in the schoolroom or over their bedroom fires before dressing-time. Lady Armitage cordially liked and appreciated Cecil, and Cecil

told me with great warmth how fond she was growing of her cousin. On every account I was very glad we had come to Grinton.

The second Sunday after our arrival we all went together to the morning service at Grinton church, where Mr. Desanges, who had volunteered to assist the clergyman of the parish, gave us a very eloquent sermon. The day was fine and sunshiny, and almost everyone preferred walking home to taking advantage of the carriage. Cecil and I were standing in the porch, I helping her to loop up her skirts so as to be out of danger from the muddy road, when John Phillips noticed us, and turned back to rejoin us. Mrs. Lushington, Salome, and some of the gentlemen had already started homewards.

Cecil had her prayerbook in her hand, and in an instant John took it from her; "That will be in your way, let me carry it for you."

Perhaps he only meant it as a commonplace civility; but I fancied I saw a great deal of significance both in that and in his

coming back to us at all. I pretended to be extremely busy in tucking up my gown, and to see and hear nothing, only with all my heart I wished there had been a fourth person of our party—somebody with whom I could have dropped behind, as we passed along that quiet wood-walk, so as to have afforded those two a *tête-à-tête*.

My wish was unexpectedly gratified; Charlie Armitage had run back to look for Mrs. Lushington's umbrella, which she had left by accident in the pew, and I pounced upon him as he left the church, and began to talk to him so eagerly that the poor little urchin had no alternative but to stay by my side and answer my questions. Perhaps in all my life I never so determinedly laid myself out to be agreeable as I did on this occasion, and to this child, whom I was constantly apprehensive would be seizing an opportunity to run forward and rejoin the merry party whose voices were borne back to us upon the frosty air.

I talked of marbles and blindman's buff—I told an interesting story of a boy, who wished to shirk an examination at one of the public schools, and for that end sought to make himself ill by swallowing sundry marbles, and (report says, but I can't credit that part of the history) three tenpenny nails into the bargain, the property of his stingiest companion. I cannot pretend to say that I thought there was any good moral attached to this history, or that it was not putting ideas into the small boy's head to whom I narrated it; but I sincerely hope he never attempted to emulate the hero's example. I don't think he ever did, or I should probably have heard of the circumstance. It is a story founded on fact, however, sceptical as I feel you to be, dear Reader; I've seen the hero of it myself, and he was in perfect good health and strength, sailing a playboat in one of the salt-water pools on the shore at ——! He had his will, and was very ill for a time, till long after the examination which he so much dreaded, but

the marbles and tenpenny nails did not kill him in any wise.

Of course Master Charlie's attention was enchained by such a history as this; thanks to the boy and the tenpenny nails, he and I dropped quite naturally into the rear when we reached the wood-walk, and by my expressing great anxiety about birds' nests, and wishing to have the particular spots pointed out to me where my companion had found any last summer, I contrived to keep a few paces behind the others, till we were almost at the house.

I had once or twice glanced jealously forward to see how John and Cecil were getting on; once or twice I had strained my ears to know whether they were talking, and several times I fancied they were. Did I not lay the flattering unction to my soul and tell myself what a clever, manœuvring old woman I was.

"Well, Cecil, my dear, I hope you had a pleasant walk," I said, briskly following her

into the room when she went to take off her bonnet.

I half expected she would have something to tell me.

"Yes, thank you," she answered, languidly.

Then, as though a thought struck her, she enquired:—

"Why did you not walk on with us, Mimi, I missed you so suddenly?"

"I did not think I was wanted, my dear," I said, clearing my throat, significantly; "you and John seemed so happy together."

She did not make me any answer, and I pursued:—

"I heard him talking very earnestly to you once, at least, I thought so; what was he saying?"

"Do you really wish to know?"

And there was a faint smile on her lips.

Of course I wished to hear.

"We were discussing the sermon when you disappeared, if you remember. Well, after that we walked in silence for ever so long.

Indeed John only made one remark from that time till we reached home."

"And that was?" I prompted eagerly.

"A mouse ran across the road, evidently very much frightened of us, and John said, 'Poor little mouse.'"

Cecil was actually laughing, and that with more of her old merriment than I had seen her display for months. Her eyes quite twinkled as she looked at my surprised and discomfited face.

"Was that all?" and I drew a long breath.

"Yes, all," said Cecil, checking her laughter, "you know you deserved being taken in, Mimi, it never does to manœuvre. Are you not aware that manœuvring in old age is just on a par with flirtation in youth? Poor Mimi, I am sorry you are vexed and disappointed; but—oh, yes, dear," and her voice grew sadder and more earnest, "it does not do to build up one's hopes unreasonably, or to care too much for anything. I do not think God

in mercy would let us have anything of which we might make an idol."

"I don't understand you, Cecil, what do you mean?"

"I mean," and she spoke clearly, while her eyes looked straight into mine, "that I would give my right hand to have never listened to anybody's fancies about John Phillips caring for me, never to have adopted any such wishes and fancies myself, for I feel, I feel from my very heart that he does not love me."

"Does not love you, oh, Cecil!"

"I am in earnest, Mimi. If he loved me as I love him, I should not need any declaration of his affection. I should feel it in his every look, and word, and action. But I never do this; he is always kind and thoughtful, always good to me—but never tender."

"I am convinced you are wrong, Cecil."

"Would to God that I were!" she cried,

passionately interlacing her fingers, "but I cannot be deceived where I feel so dreadfully; my love gives me eyes and ears, quickens my senses a hundredfold. My reason says I am not mistaken; it said so as we walked together just now when his thoughts were—God, knows, with some one else, certainly not with me! When I spoke I startled him out of a reverie that had made him smile; he was thinking of another woman maybe, but not of that woman who walked at his side! My reason says the same to me now; it will say so again, though alas! there are times when my will and my passion put a veil on my reason and forbid it to see clearly or to testify to the truth. I am not Cecil Claridge always, I am mad sometimes and then I sink down to be only John Phillips's slave, his servant—oh, Mimi, help me to shake off the delusion, to be myself again, to act as a Christian and a woman! I am sure I do not love God enough, if I did I should not make such an idol of one of his creatures—pray for me that

God may have mercy upon a miserable sinner !”

I heard all that Cecil said ; I marked her suffering ; her words pierced me painfully, for they had an accent of truth that I could not withstand. But I put her scruples and fears and misgivings away from me and refused to listen to them. I would not have her made miserable ; it should be, it would be as she wished ; she must marry John Phillips ; instead of praying for or with her I laboured for half-an-hour to combat her convictions, to make her believe that she must ultimately be made happy.

Should I not have done better had I sought to point out to her how there is a love dearer, and better, and purer than the love of husband and wife, than any affection in this Universe—that love of God which from childhood we couple with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost ? I called myself Cecil’s best friend—what an unfriendly part I acted towards her !

I went to my own room in a state of great excitement. I was anxious about Cecil. I was resolved not to let this state of suspense continue. I came to a rash determination at last—I told myself I would try and give John Phillips a hint!

I did, and it was on this wise. Accidentally the Tuesday morning following I found myself alone with him in the drawing room. The Lushingtons had just departed, *en route* for their own home. Lady Armitage and Cecil were upstairs, and raw, misty morning as it was, Salome had announced her intention of going out walking with the children, and was even now getting her things on. Lord John Rayleigh and Mr. Desanges had gone out shooting with Sir Hugh. John Phillips must have found the society of us ladies very agreeable when he preferred remaining at home.

I was sitting on the ottoman near the window, working at a very elaborate piece of cross-stitch that was destined to re-cover one

of the screens at Burton Abbots. John, idly lounging by my side, was making great havoc amongst the bright-coloured wools which I had been at such pains to arrange in their proper shades not ten minutes before. We were talking about York, whither we were going tomorrow, the 9th of November, which was the day fixed for the Hunt Ball. We, of Lady Armitage's party, had rooms awaiting us at the Great Northern Hotel; John Phillips was to be with us; Lord John Rayleigh was going to stay with some friends near York, and Mr. Desanges, who considered dancing incorrect, was returning home to his parish. He had told Cecil so at breakfast, concluding with a profound sigh, which made little Mrs. Lushington nearly die of laughter.

"Do you come back here on Friday, Miss White?" John asked, twirling my best scissors with great velocity round his fingers.

"No, we go home direct. What is to become of you?"

"The Egertons want me to go to them; I

almost think I shall, as I am so near their neighbourhood, and it might seem rude to decline, after refusing their last kind invitation. They are to be at York, and I can go back with them."

"Oh, then we shall see you again?" I said, in a pleased voice. "You will have to come over and visit the Abbots and your old home. I don't think there are many changes since you went away."

"So Cecil says. Burton village is as primitive as ever, I hear—I should like to see it of all things, and the old people too. Yes, thank you, I shall certainly try and get over. Shall you be staying at home for some time?"

"It all depends on circumstances," I answered, looking up suddenly at him; and I fancied he seemed confused, for my scissors dropped from his hand to the carpet. "I think Cecil scarcely knows her own plans yet. If she keeps pretty well she would prefer not leaving the Abbots this winter; but, of course,

if she is delicate we must try a warmer climate."

"But she really is stronger than she was, you are not apprehensive about her now?" he questioned rather quickly.

"I attribute her present delicacy rather to the anxiety she has undergone lately, than to any constitutional weakness. She has had so much to try her!"

He sighed, and said—"Yes, I fear so."

"The best thing in the world for her now is rest and happiness," I went on; "when her mind is at ease I fully trust that she will rapidly regain her strength and vigour. She has been very strong until this summer, and when we get her fairly settled at home, with her hands full of interests and occupations, I feel sure she will do well, for she is so gentle and unselfish that so long as there is anything to do for others, she quite forgets herself."

"Yes, she is so very good, she bears trial so wonderfully," John said, enthusiastically.

I did not quite trace the allusion of his

speech; but at any rate the tone was satisfactory, and I smiled to myself and bent lower over my embroidery.

"She has a very fine character," I continued. "Mr. Scott says that he sees in her a great resemblance to her poor mother, who was so devoted to that worthless husband of hers. I am sure Cecil will be a treasure to whoever gets her; she will make an admirable wife."

I purposely avoided looking at John Phillips now. As he made no remark I thought I might follow up my advantage, and I said—"Both Mr. Scott and I are anxious that she should marry soon, we think it will be so much happier and better for her to have a natural guardian. The management of her property would otherwise be a great anxiety to her."

I hesitated, but I was both surprised and displeased by the question with which John Phillips filled up my pause.

"Cecil's fortune is very considerable, is it not?"

I looked up with a flushed face, and my glance might have annihilated him had he not turned away his head and been intent on looking out of the window.

"She will be rich, unusually rich for a woman," I made answer; "but Cecil's fortune is her least recommendation; her heart is worth all the gold in the world! I do not think that the man who marries her will marry her for her money; at least I am sure she would not become the wife of anyone whose motives she has reason to think are so mercenary."

John said, in a pained tone of voice—"Ah, she should have married one whose fortune was equal to her own and then that risk would have been obviated."

I thought he was depressed and jealous, perhaps he fancied that I mistrusted his motive. I should only make further mischief if I left him under this impression and I hastened to undeceive him.

"She might have done so once," I said; "but not now—not now." And I looked at him so fixedly that he bent his head in token of comprehension. "Now if she ever marries it will be one who can appreciate her for herself, who without under estimating her wealth, can yet value it as only one amongst her many recommendations. We are not ambitious for a rich husband for Cecil; Mr. Scott and I shall be quite happy to see her united to a man whose love and faith and devotion to her will fully atone for any lack of worldly substance—our first hope is to see her a happy wife."

I paused. Now I thought I've done it; he must see who and what I mean. I could scarcely have spoken more strongly, and yet I had not betrayed Cecil in anywise. I was quite pleased with myself.

John moved restlessly from his seat and went to the window. After a few minutes' silence he said, "Well, perhaps you are right; I daresay you are, but, well," and he hesitated,

"I wonder if Cecil herself would be willing to marry now," and his emphasis on that word now was as strong as mine had been the time before.

The youth was an enigma; his speech sounded so very strangely to me, I could not half understand it, and I balanced my needle between my fingers and fixed my eyes on him curiously. Was he awkwardly trying to make out from me if Cecil were likely to say *yes* to him if he asked her *now*. Dear! it was very odd, but men are such unaccountable creatures! And maybe, John Phillips looked upon me almost as a mother (my vanity said that), and asked me things he wouldn't have asked anyone else; or perhaps he did not dare risk a proposal to Cecil without a half-permission from me.

I was on the point of answering him when the door burst open, and Salome came in, laughing and talking, followed by a trio of little urchins in knickerbockers. I stopped short, of course, on her appearance, and the children

attacked John Phillips, and begged him to come out with them.

He acceded almost too readily; rather stupidly, as I thought, for I wanted to have had some further conversation with him. As it was, I signed to him as he was passing the ottoman, and asked him to pick up a stray skein of wool which was lying at my feet. When he gave it into my hand, and Salome's attention was taken up at the other end of the room, I managed to whisper confidentially and meaningly: "I think *she* would marry now if she were asked by the right person."

For an instant John stood before me with an expression of absolute bewilderment on his face. But I smiled encouragingly at him, and at the same time enjoined caution by a momentary glance of intelligence to where Salome was standing with her head raised and her eyes obviously fixed on us; "Hush!—take care—you understand—God bless you!"

His face was suddenly flooded with heart sunshine; eyes, cheeks, and lips, bore the im-

press of smiling happiness ; he seemed almost overpowered, and regardless of what anybody thought or said, he wrung my hand with violence, and exclaimed in a voice husky with conflicting emotions, "Thank you from my soul, Miss White; you have made me so happy!"

"Mr. Phillips, do come; we're waiting," called Charlie, and with a kindly look backward, John left my side and joined Salome and the children.

Well, he was naturally a very kind and good-natured youth, but when, of course, he must have been longing to hear more from me, it did strike me as a very great stretch of unselfishness on his part to go out walking with a pack of children—and Cecil might be coming down any moment, too, and he could easily have made an opportunity for speaking to her!

Really I think there is a great density of perception about men!

CHAPTER VII.

OUR VISIT TO MILTON.

"The answer eloquent, where the soul shines,
And darts in one quick glance a long reply."

BYRON.

"A trifle, sweet! oh true love spells,
True love interprets right alone.
It is light upon the letter dwells,
For all the spirit is his own.
So, if I waste words now, in truth
You must blame Love. His early rage
Had force to make me rhyme in youth,
And make me talk too much in age."

TENNISON.

A VERY short time after John Phillips had left me, Lady Armitage and Cecil came down together. They had been up in the nursery with the babies, so Cecil told me, and now she sat down beside her cousin, and the two

began to cut out and manufacture some very small articles of infantile attire, the patterns whereof had particularly pleased Cecil, and she wanted to take them home with her as wrinkles for the Burton Clothing Club. I heard her and Lady Armitage chatting together about fit and make, and then indiscriminately of all sorts of nursery matters, juvenile ailments, baby clothes, and no one knows what. I believe Lady Armitage was so wrapped up in her children that there was no topic in the world in the discussion of which she so thoroughly luxuriated, and that an interested listener like Cecil was the greatest possible treat to her. For my part, fond as I am of girls and boys of a reasonable age, I have no great appreciation for babies, that have pink faces, and puckered skins, and greet one's ears with excruciating little cries. I can't find beauty in claw-like little hands which clutch the air helplessly, and unmeaning blue eyes which always look as though they had tears in them; I never

touch one but it cries, and how to soothe it I've no more notion than a schoolboy. A chattering little child, with soft velvety skin and cheeks rosy with bloom, who makes funny speeches and holds trustingly on by your finger, is a far different creature; one can love and admire *that*, but save to a mother herself surely there is little charm in an infant! Lady Armitage evidently thought otherwise, and Cecil was an exception to the general rule that babies are uninteresting to strangers, for she talked lovingly of the baby upstairs and asked questions about it, and seemed to admire it even more than she did that little curly-headed Willy, who was my pet.

I bent over my work, and listened to the womanlike conversation of my two companions. By and by, I ceased to pay attention to that long recital about Charlie's last attack of croup and the remedies that had relieved him, to Lady Armitage's fears that Harry was growing bow-legged — "her nurse had

but one fault, she was so eager to make the children walk at an early age that she set them prematurely on their feet, such a mistake!" and closing my ears I gave the reins to my fancy, and built up vision after vision of happiness for John and Cecil. I went years and years forward—I saw her married, I nursed her little children, one of them was my godchild—what a goose I was! When I ended off, I think I was marrying Cecil's eldest daughter to one of these same bairnies of whom the mother by the fireplace was speaking so tenderly!

I started suddenly from my reverie, for Lady Armitage was addressing me. "What are we to do this afternoon, Miss White? it looks misty and damp, but it does not really rain; should you be afraid of going out?"

I am never afraid of rain and cold, and I said so; Lady Armitage thereupon beginning to arrange how we should have the clarence immediately after luncheon, and drive to some place or another where there was fine scenery

that we should enjoy (I wondered how we were to see it in the mist), and where, moreover, dwelt a certain old cousin of her own, also allied to Cecil in some remote way, who would enjoy seeing us.

"Mr. Milton used to know your grandfather very well," Lady Armitage said to Cecil, "he often speaks of Burton Abbots and the days when your mother was a child—poor old man; it is one of his greatest pleasures to repeat old stories of the past. He will be so glad to see you and to hear of the changes in your part of the world. You will gratify him very much by going to visit him and admiring his beautiful place. I only wish we had had a finer afternoon for the expedition."

The luncheon bell rang and I grew uneasy that Salome had not made her appearance. Careless, unthinking child, she never paid the least regard to punctuality or decorum, and so long as she was amused never cared for what other people might think or say.

We were nearly half through luncheon, and I had grown quite out of humour, before John Phillips and the boys came into the dining-room, he seemingly rather surprised by the discovery of his lateness. For once in his life his self-possession forsook him, he coloured like a guilty child when Lady Armitage playfully rallied him on his late appearance, and he sank down in the seat at Cecil's side, without attempting any apology, leaving Charlie to explain all about where they had been and what they had seen.

Salome had run upstairs to take off her hat and presently she came down, the colour on her smooth cheeks somewhat deeper than usual, but in the very highest spirits, incessantly passing funny speeches and jokes with her small companions, quite undisturbed by the knowledge that she was detaining everyone, but eating her luncheon in her leisurely way, and never heeding my impatient glances and the signs I made to her across the table—I quite regretted that she was not still a curly-

haired child whom I might have bidden,
“give over chattering and eat your dinner!”

It was fortunate that Lady Armitage was one of those kind hearted, goodnatured people who readily make excuses for young people, and have patience with their provoking ways; she played with a glass of jelly in the most exemplary manner, talking kindly and listening good-humouredly to everyone; never seeming to notice Salome's progress; but it was not lost upon me how she contrived to be only just finished herself when the child at last laid down her fork and *had done*.

“We are going to drive over to Milton, this afternoon, Miss Fielding,” Lady Armitage said as we rose from the table.

“Oh, Mamma, are you going to Milton, may I go with you? You said I might go the next time you went,” exclaimed a little voice at her side, and her skirt was besieged by a pair of imploring hands: “Oh, Mamma, do say yes.”

I was at Lady Armitage's right hand, near

•

enough to over-hear her whisper when she bent down :—

“Hush my child, there will not be room enough in the clarence to-day, you shall go another time.”

“But you *promised*, Mamma,” sturdily began Charlie, “and I want so to see Teddy and George.”

His mother would have checked him, but Salome was beforehand; she was laying her pretty white hands on the urchin’s shoulders, and looking up at his mamma in that coaxing way of hers :—

“Oh, Lady Armitage, he’s such a mite, he will take up no room, do let him go. You will sit on my knee, won’t you, Charlie? and I’ll put my crinoline into as small a space as I can. I know we can manage, see your Mamma is smiling! ‘Silence gives consent,’ doesn’t it?”

Salome had her own way, of course; she always had her way with everyone, and a minute afterwards we went to get ready;

John Phillips eagerly embracing the offer of the seat by the coachman. He evidently did not fear cold or anything so long as he could be in somebody's society, as I whispered to Cecil when we were going up the staircase. Salome was behind us, and I looked round sharply but a moment afterwards to assure myself that she had not overheard my remark. No such thing, she was leaning over the carved banisters, looking down into the hall below with a smiling look of intelligence on her face that startled me inexpressibly. She turned suddenly and met my eye, but beyond a little, short, ringing laugh, which had a very happy sound, she did not betray any guilt or nervousness. So far I was reassured.

Why or what should I fear? Was she not laying her cheek against my shoulder and saying as though in explanation: "What a funny, amusing little urchin he is!" She was referring to Charlie, and of, course, it was to Charlie that she had been smiling and nodding over the banisters!

We had rather a slow and certainly a cold drive to Milton, John Phillips being outside the carriage, and only able to look round now and then, and make a remark through the glass to Salome and Cecil, who were sitting with their backs to the horses. Cecil looked unusually gloomy, and when I asked her some question, said she had a headache. Lady Armitage was anxiously discussing various educational points with me and seemed very much interested therein. The only quite happy looking person of our party was Salome, who, true to her promise, kept little Charlie on her lap (though there really was no occasion for her doing so) and was very merry with him about some nonsense or another. Indeed, towards the end of the drive, Master Charlie became unpleasantly uproarious, at least so I thought, and I felt displeased with Salome for encouraging him to fidget and make a noise. The child was never still for a moment; he was perpetually scraping his thick boots against my silk gown, sometimes

he was giving me unpleasant kicks as he wriggled about in Salome's lap or made a bound forward to tap at the window and attract John Phillips' attention, or he leant his curly head against Salome's new velvet mantle, and the stupid girl never prevented him, but let him do just as he liked, though she knew as well as I that velvet marks with the merest trifle, and is too expensive to be wasted—she really ought to have been more careful !

I was not by any means sorry when we arrived at Milton, and found ourselves comfortably housed in old Mr. Milton's library, where the fire in the pleasant old-fashioned grate was large enough to thaw every one into more genial spirits.

The afternoon might be a shade less misty than had been the morning, but it was still the afternoon of a very unpleasant November day, cold, raw and damp ; great drops of moisture were weighting the evergreens, as we saw in looking from the window ; but dull

day as it was, we had sufficient view beyond of sloping banks from which jutted great pieces of white rock, of a gliding, smooth river winding serpent-like through the trees; of distant undulating ground, to assure us what a lovely spot this must be under more sunshiny auspices.

The master of the house came into the library to see us—a little, wizened, old man, supported on crutches, but with a face of which the expression personified a calm and happy old age. He was alone at home, for once, as he told Lady Armitage with a smile; the married daughter who usually resided with him being absent with her husband and children; and over and over again he deplored his inability to show off his sturdy little grandsons to this young cousin—the house was quite dull without them, he said—and I could well fancy what an indulgent grand-father he must be. He was indeed a charming old gentleman; his faculties were so clear, his manner so hearty, his tones so pleasant. He

bade us all welcome in such a cordial fashion, that I, for one, lost my heart to him on the spot; and I saw my darling brighten up and show herself in her best mood, as she sat by his side and answered his questions, and listened with real interest to his reminiscences of her mother and grand-father.

“You are like your mother, child,” he said, over and over again; “very like your mother, especially when you smile. But you are scarcely so merry-looking.”

I wondered to hear him say so. My ideal of Mrs. Claridge had been so very opposite to any picture of light-heartedness. But the old man’s next remark explained everything to me.

“I never saw your mother after her marriage, and I never met your father at all—poor thing, it was not quite a happy union, was it? Well, we can’t help these things, and they are wisely over-ruled, no doubt. But the young ones now-a-days must take warning by their parents’ experience, and do

better themselves!" the old man's eyes were travelling from the girl at his side to the young man who leant against the mantelpiece, and again they went further and fixed themselves on the pretty maiden who sat in the full light from the window, looking more like an angel than a human being as she nestled into the little low velvet chair, with her long golden hair straying over her shoulders, her hat on her lap, and one tiny soft hand supporting her flushed cheek. She seemed to be in a pleasant reverie, and even the pause and the old man's fixed gaze did not arouse her.

"She is my half-sister, Salome Fielding," Cecil said gently, marking her companion's interest.

"Ah! I did not know your father had had a second daughter. What a pretty creature she is."

"No, she is not my father's child. She was the daughter of my step-mother by her former husband;" and Cecil spoke hurriedly as though she were anxious to silence any

further inquiries. Poor thing, she had reason enough to shrink from any discussion of the past!

Mr. Milton expressed anxiety that Cecil should see his grounds, and loudly regretted his own inability to lionize her over them. So, by and by, it was settled that we should all, with the exception of Lady Armitage, who preferred remaining in the house with her relative, go out for a little while, and, Charlie, who was well acquainted with the place, was elected to the post of cicerone, and received many instructions as to where he was to take us, and to what he was especially to attract our admiration on the way.

He was very proud of his office, and, when we left the house, eagerly took possession of Salome's hand, forcing her to run with him down the steep gravel path which led to the river, on the margin of which he paused, and we, following more leisurely, saw him gesticulating with his little arms, and evidently

chattering away at a great rate to his companion.

Truly Milton was a beautiful place, and in perfect order. Mr. Milton took a tender pride in the embellishment of his home, and far and wide he was renowned as a good landlord, an active and liberal country squire, a noted farmer and horticulturist.

Cecil paused over and over again to admire the arrangements of the grounds, the good taste which regulated every arrangement, the pictorial effect of each new prospect. The trees were remarkably fine, the shrubs rare and well tended. Nature had done much to beautify the spot, and art had followed up the lesson, but with such judicious subservience, that no effort was too apparent, and nothing jarred on the good taste of the beholder. Truly the best landscape gardener is also the best and most attentive student of nature.

An ardent lover of natural beauty, I feasted my eyes on the prospect that spread out before

me in the long vistas of park land and wood ; in the combinations of rock, tree, and water ; in the pictorial openings which gave to view the distant country, and the line of hills over which the mist hung, cloud-like. The path was narrow, and only permitted two to walk together. I purposely drew back, and let Cecil and John go forward alone — I thought that both would prefer it !

Salome and her little friend were waiting for us by the waterside, and the former looked round to claim our admiration.

“Is it not beautiful? don’t you quite long to sketch, Cecil? I do. I don’t think it could be prettier, even on a fine day. Do look how picturesque the mist is over there.”

But just then a cold, raw wind crept round the rocks, and puffed its damp breath in our faces. Salome laughed, and put up her hand to save her hat. I saw Cecil shivering, and I urged that we should walk on briskly, for it was too cold to dawdle.

So Salome and her child-friend trotted on

along the path, laughing and talking, and I hoped that Cecil and John would renew their conversation. No such thing! Salome was looking back over her shoulder, appealing to John—it was something or other about another gentleman's seat which she saw in the distance, and he did not seem to hear distinctly what she said, for he hurried on to answer her. I saw him join her on the path, squeeze himself in beside little Charlie, and walk along at her side, with his hand on the child's shoulder. I wondered he did not come back to us ; but he did not—perhaps Salome's idle chatter left him no opening for escape, perhaps he was shy, and did not know how to extricate himself from the toils of such a pretty fairy ; at any rate we never had him with us again, till we all met on the broad walk before the house.

I placed myself indignantly by Cecil's side ; was I not her mother and protector, and had been such for years ? Should she not find in me at least one firm and unchanging friend ?

The other party walked much more quickly than did we, and we were soon left far behind, we lost sight of them amongst the trees, but every now and then their voices were borne back to us from the distance, sounding, oh ! so merry and mocking.

Poor Cecil, the landscape had lost its charm for her now, she seemed to feel the cold intensely, and shivered and looked depressed. I gave up the task of talking to her, for the effort was only painful to us both, and beyond an occasional remark on the damp or the cold we walked on in silence. We met the wind full in our faces, for we had left the shelter of the rocks ; the mist was creeping round again, and the damp fell so heavily that it felt like rain.

The river, hoarse and swollen, discoloured by the rain which had fallen further up the country, swept angrily past us, making a disagreeable sluicing sound as it washed against the banks, bearing on its muddy surface, light substances, foam, straws, pieces of wood, de-

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caying leaves, which were arrested in their course by the stripped, drooping branches of the trees, and became entangled in them. Something, I know not what, in the sound of the water, made me think of the noise of the sea, as I had heard it that summer midnight after George Vivian's death, and I shuddered involuntarily at the thought.

Just at that moment the path curved round. Salome was just above us on the bank, and we heard her laughing—oh! so merrily and gladly.

I glanced at Cecil. She had no colour in her face, and her eyes were wild and restless. She looked round at me with a sort of desperate calmness and clutched my hand nervously: "Oh, Mimi! why was I born?"

The words seemed forced from her. I never saw such a face of hopeless misery as that which she turned towards me. For the first time I read what feverish jealousy was consuming her heart:

"Cecil," I exclaimed, eagerly, "you are

quite mistaken ; you are tormenting yourself cruelly, needlessly. You cannot pretend to think that there is anything between Salome and ——." I could not say his name.

She spoke with a great effort. "Yes, I fancied it before ; I am sure of it now ; John Phillips loves her."

"He doesn't ! It is wrong and wicked of you to say so—it is, indeed. He only likes Salome because she is your sister and speaks to him of you ; he, like everyone else, is amused by her *naïveté* and fun. But he does not love her—don't dream of such a thing ! And as to Salome herself, how can you indulge such an idea ; she does not even pay as much attention to him as she does to Lord John or Mr. Desanges, or any other gentleman who comes in her way. That sort of nonsense talking and flirtation is natural to her. I don't like it, of course, but I don't believe she can altogether help it ; she seems to have a mania for making everyone fond of her."

"It is a cruel, heartless mania," Cecil said excitedly. "If it is as you say, it is a proof of the most horrid ingratitude on her part. Have I not done all for her that I could? Would I stop short of doing anything now? She might have taken all else that I had and welcome, but she should not have robbed me of this one thing which is my life—my happiness—my hope! It is play to her, but it is death to me! You say she does not care for him, Mimi, but she will make him care; she does make him care for her; she will steal his heart from me, only to trample it under her wicked feet!"

"Oh, hush! hush!" Cecil, I implored—"don't be unjust. Remember Salome is but a child, and she does not know that you care for John Phillips! let me have permission to give her just one hint and I know all will be right. She would not pain you for the world."

"No, on no account! I forbid it, Mimi, promise me you will do nothing of the kind."

I promised her anything she willed, and frightened out of my prudence, I proceeded to narrate to her the conversation I had had with John Phillips that very morning in the drawing room. I thought it might re-assure and comfort her. I did not mean to tell her everything, but I have no aptitude for keeping secrets, and very soon all, or nearly all had oozed out—my incautious hints. John's eloquent thanks. Cecil's cheeks burnt crimson with shame—with anger—with undefined happiness, there can be these combinations in life and in love. She was displeased and disappointed with me, but she could not forget what I had said about John Phillips; she could not help feeling glad about it. "Oh, was I sure?" she questioned; "did he really say so? did he really look like that? Was I certain I was not deceiving myself and her?" "Quite certain," I said, and then I would have gone on speaking to her about it, but she checked me abruptly, and with tears in her eyes.

"Oh, don't, Mimi; I feel so ashamed; don't

let us talk about it. I ought to know nothing—don't. And, Mimi, how wicked I was to speak so of dear Salome; I did not mean it, only I was angry and said bitter things in my passion—forget them."

Standing there under the shadow of the trees I kissed her in silence, and in my heart of hearts prayed God to bless her. And so he did, but in His own way!

By and bye we rejoined our companions, who having once reached the house and missed us, had turned back to see if we were coming. I could not help being aggravated by the gay tones of Salome's voice as she came towards us, by her smiling glances and asides to John Phillips, and I saw that in spite of herself, these things also annoyed Cecil. I was even vexed by Salome's wonderful prettiness, which the cold rather increased than otherwise, deepening as it did the roses on her cheeks, while the wind had blown her shining hair into most picturesque disorder.

She laughed gaily in our faces, and with a want of tact for which I could have shaken her, proceeded to draw attention to poor Cecil's appearance, which, what with the cold and mental anxiety, was certainly far from prepossessing.

"Are you cold, dear?" she said, in her fondling fashion. "You look so starved and wretched."

"Yes, Miss Claridge has got such a red nose, hasn't she?" added little Charlie, poking up his pert face, and pointing a finger towards the offending feature.

I would have given anything to have boxed his ears!

Salome laughed, and called him an impertinent imp. Never before did her soft, ringing laugh so grate on my senses?

Cecil hastily averted her face, but not before I had seen the moisture in her eyes. Poor thing, when the heart is full a very little matter will make it well over, even the thoughtless chatter of a child!

We went back into the library where we found Mr. Milton and Lady Armitage in their old positions besides the fire, her ungloved hand resting on the velvet arm of the old man's chair, and her kind face bent forward to his. They scarcely seemed to have marked the long period of our absence, and the explanation which hovered on my lips was unspoken.

Mr. Milton, in our absence, had sent for refreshments for us, and a tray of wine, cake, and grapes stood on the table awaiting our return. Salome readily took the chair which John Phillips drew forward for her, and ate more grapes than could possibly be good for her, pronouncing them excellent, while the folds of her pretty silk dress were made the receptacle for innumerable sticky crumbs which fell down in showers from the rich cake that she was enjoying with a child's relish.

Mr. Milton was evidently pleased by her appreciation of his feast, and pressed her to

take more and more, till I really thought she would be ill, and hinted something to that effect. But the child repeated my warning aloud, with a merry laugh, which everyone found infectious, and declared that nothing ever disagreed with her and she had never been poorly in her life. Well, so far she was right, but she should rather have displayed thankfulness about the matter than have treated it as ground for boasting! What a contrast she was to Cecil, who sitting on the sofa beside me, played nervously with the half-dozen grapes on her plate, and finally in despair decoyed Charlie to her side and let him finish them for her.

Now Lady Armitage asked leave to ring and order the carriage; we were going. The clarence was brought to the door, and old Mr. Milton insisted on accompanying us into the hall. He leant on his crutch and cordially shook hands with us all, inviting us to come and see him again whenever we might return to his neighbourhood. Cecil was the last to

bid him farewell, and he held her hand fondly between his own, as though some soft feeling of kinship, or an old far away memory of youth and happiness stirred his heart while he looked at her. All the rest of us had seated ourselves in the carriage, and John was standing at the door to help Cecil in as he had before helped each of us.

"Good bye, Mr. Milton," Cecil said, withdrawing her hand.

"Aye, good bye, my dear. But you must give an old man a kiss for your mother's sake, musn't you? God bless you."

My darling's face was flushed when she seated herself opposite to me, and as she drew up the glass I saw her lips quivering. She had been touched by that proof of kindness and interest shown to her by the kinsman, who was almost a stranger to her. Perhaps she was contrasting it with the coldness of the world in general, and of some one in particular!

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. DESANGES CONGRATULATES ME.

"Human experience, like the stern-light of a ship at sea, illumines only the path which we have passed over."

COLERIDGE.

"Youth knows nought of changes! Age has traced them all, expects, and can interpret them."

COMMENUS.

THIS evening again there was a dinner party, and Lord John Rayleigh's honourable acquaintance not being present, that gentleman chose (to my inexpressible annoyance) to make himself and Salome disgracefully conspicuous by a flirtation, which drew everybody's eyes to them, and afforded food for general speculation and gossip. Lord John

devoted himself to the child from the very moment that she made her appearance in the drawing-room; he took her in to dinner, despite a broad hint from Lady Armitage that his services were required by a dowager with a handle to her name. He followed the ladies almost immediately after they left the dining-room, and planting himself by Salome's side he never deserted his station all the evening. When she sang, he turned over the leaves of her music; when she rested, he conversed with her; look at the two when I would they were always laughing and talking together. Lord John was speaking to her in an undertone, or she was whispering a reply to him behind her fan. I felt very angry and really annoyed, for I saw that everybody was paying attention to the pair, and drawing conclusions that were, in any case, undesirable. Once or twice at the commencement of the evening, John Phillips attempted to speak to Salome, but he succeeded in gaining so little of her attention that he speedily desisted;

and when he came into the drawing-room with the rest of the gentlemen, he took a seat between Cecil and me, which he retained to the last.

Perhaps Salome's conduct, annoying as it was to me, was not altogether displeasing to her half sister. Cecil seemed re-assured; she brightened up in word and tone and let John draw her into a pleasant and sociable conversation about her home affairs, and the Burton parish, in which, though I occasionally put in my word, I was better pleased to act the part of listener. Oh! I did like to see those two together and happy!

Presently Mr. Desanges came and sat himself down at my side, bringing with him an over-powering odour of *millefleurs*. For a few seconds he amused himself with watching Salome and Lord John, who were enjoying a *tête-à-tête* by the piano, laughing very much over a song which Lord John held in his hand, and some expression in which he was

evidently pointing out to his companion, who looked a little uneasy and conscious even while she laughed.

"Have you ever been at Coigninton?" asked my companion, with a fascinating smile. (Coigninton was the name of Lord John Rayleigh's residence in Scotland).

I coldly answered in the negative.

"It is a beautiful place," Mr. Desanges pursued; "a splendid house, built by the old Duke, his father—gothic architecture, such woods and such shooting, and the scenery around is exquisite. It is quite a shame that it has been uninhabited so long; Lord John complains that he has hitherto found it dull, but now we must hope," and Mr. Desanges smiled and showed his teeth, "We must hope that a lady's presence will effectually enliven it."

I said nothing. I was too much displeased to attempt any explanation. What was Mr. Desanges insinuating? Surely not that my

beautiful Salome was going to marry that yellow-haired puppy over yonder, who could not even see *her* without an eye-glass?

“What a wretchedly cold day it has been,” I said presently, with an attempt to turn the conversation.

“It has indeed. It was frightfully cold on the moors. Lord John did nothing but grumble all the time we were out and propose coming home. I fancy that not even the best day’s sport in the year could atone to him for the loss of the society within doors.”

I nearly turned my back on my companion and took a book from the table. But Mr. Desanges was not to be put aside; he would look over the photographs with me and talk about them. By and bye we came upon a *carte de visite* likeness of the hero in question.

“Lord John, I declare!” exclaimed Mr. Desanges in a tone of delighted recognition. “Capital! how very like, just his expression, is it not? He would be a good-looking man if he had a few inches more height. Ah,

that's his sister, Lady Georgiana Frankland, do you know his brother, the Duke of Harborough? I saw him at Torquay the other day; he's dreadfully delicate, consumptive, not likely to last many months. If he died Lord John would come in for the property—he a worthy young man, has been a little wild, perhaps, but matrimony steadies down the most careless. I am sure he may be truly thankful if he gets a good wife, Miss White; it would be the making of him. And his mother is so anxious he should marry; he is her favourite son, and she is such a charming person, a daughter of the late Marquis of Todmorden."

I only bowed in answer to this tirade. Just then a hand was laid on my shoulder. I looked up and saw that it was Salome herself who was retiring from the piano with Lord John in attendance.

"Looking at the photographs, are you?" she said gaily. "Oh, that's you!" and she turned round to Lord John. "That is very

good, it is one of *Silvy's*, isn't it? What a pretty background—you must let me have one for my book."

Lord John would be delighted. I heard him say so in a positively delighted voice, adding in a sotto voce scarce audible to us—"but you must make it an exchanged compliment; I, too, boast of a photograph book."

What Salome answered I cannot tell, for she was moving away and her voice lowered.

I hastily closed the book, venting my indignation in a noisy snapping of the clasps. As I replaced it on the table I glanced towards John Phillips and Cecil, and caught the eye of the former. He was looking flushed, excited, eager, biting his lips; when our gaze met he turned sharply away, and went on with his conversation with Cecil.

"I am not premature in offering my congratulations, I think, Miss White," a soft voice whispered in my ear.

I turned round angrily to Mr. Desanges, for it was he who had addressed me. "Indeed

I do not know to what you refer," I answered stiffly.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, I am premature. I fancied"—he stammered, dropping his eyes to the carpet—"I fancied Miss Fielding's engagement had been public. Pray excuse my precipitancy, but she is such a charming young lady, one can't help feeling interested in her."

"There is no engagement to be made public," I answered coldly; "nor is there, to my knowledge, any likelihood of there being such a thing." I spoke the more constrainedly that I heard the sudden lull in the conversation at my other side, and felt that both Cecil and John Phillips were listening to me.

"Believe me, I am most sorry to have made such an unfortunate mistake," Mr. Desanges began in a subdued voice; "I am afraid you must deem me almost impertinent. But I judged from appearances, and fell into the proverbial error, pray forgive me. You see those two," and Mr. Desanges's eyes were

momentarily directed to Lord John Rayleigh and little Salome: "those two are so constantly together, and the young lady does not appear to dislike the gentleman's attentions, while he, on his side, is so unmistakably devoted, that—that—"

"Really Mr. Desanges," I interrupted, "I do not think we do much good in prolonging this conversation. You made a natural mistake, and now if you please, we will have done with it."

He bowed, and said something in a very hurried voice about being extremely sorry, and *of course*. I did not clearly see to what the *of course* referred, but I judged it wise to let the expression pass.

For a few moments we spoke on indifferent subjects, and then he made some excuse for leaving me, taking refuge with a stout lady whose good-humoured countenance might seem reassuring after my asperity. When he changed his seat I could not help turning

round to my companions with a sigh of relief.

"Was anything ever so annoying?" I said to Cecil.

She smiled, but made no reply. John Phillips exclaimed excitedly, "Abominable little puppy!"

"*Little*," thought I to myself. "Mr. Desanges is no less than you, yourself, John Phillips; but people never know themselves. I should like him to hear you call him *little*! Why, the term is more suitable to that red-headed lordling over yonder!"

What in the world prompted Mr. Desanges to take an interest in Salome Fielding, I cannot imagine; but that he did so is undeniable. Though he did not again speak to me about her, he praised her beauty, her music, her manners; I could hear him, continuing the strain, even when he was playing the agreeable to the fat lady. And at the very last, when the last carriageful of guests was depart-

ing, and Sir Hugh and Lord John were in the hall, helping the stout dowager and her daughters to put on their opera cloaks, chancing to remember that I had left my workbox in the ante-room and going thither to seek it, I came suddenly upon Lady Armitage and Mr. Desanges who were talking together by the door. I could not help hearing Mr. Desanges say : " Fifteen thousand pounds, you don't mean to say so ? why she is quite an heiress. I had no idea she had a farthing ; well I must say I am surprised ! "

" Perhaps it would have been only kind to have given you an earlier hint," Lady Armitage answered, and her tone had an unmistakable accent of sarcasm.

Mr. Desanges laughed it off, " No, no, I could not flatter myself that I should ever have had a chance there, that is reserved for a younger and a more fortunate man. Well, he's a lucky fellow, beauty and riches are a rare combination."

Lady Armitage stepped forward, and met me face to face. A smile came to her lips, and she said, loud enough for Mr. Desanges to hear :—

“Miss White, you have not an enviable post as the chaperone of those two young ladies, they send half the world distracted, and I don’t know how you will satisfy the multitudinous aspirants—however, there is safety in numbers.”

“They have not been so terribly persecuted as yet,” I said with an attempt at being goodhumoured, though in reality I was anything but pleased.

“Both are pretty well able to take care of themselves, Cecil has too much sense to make any error, and Salome is too young to think of marrying at all yet. By the way, where is she?” and I looked curiously around, for I had missed her from her station in the drawing-room. Yes, she had disappeared somehow, and only Cecil was in the room when I re-entered

it—Cecil, standing by the fireplace, and playing with a handscreen.

“Where is Salome?” I enquired of this last.

Cecil looked up, and pointed her screen to the further end of the apartment where heavy crimson curtains drooped over the entrance to the conservatory.

“I believe they are still investigating the weather. She was anxious for a fine day to-morrow and journeyed into the conservatory to examine the appearance of the sky. Mr. Phillips thought she was imprudent in staying so long in the cold and he went to look after her, but he has been in no hurry to return, so I suppose the night is not so chilly after all.”

Only one who, like me, knew every turn and inflection of Cecil’s voice, could have guessed that she was annoyed.

“I’ll go and see after them,” I said hastily, “Salome should not run the risk of a cold in this way, it is so foolish of her.”

"I don't think you need really be afraid, Miss White," Lady Armitage remarked, "for the conservatory is fully as warm as this room. But they will not see much so far as the weather is concerned, for I heard Sir Hugh saying that it is an exceedingly misty night."

The clock on the mantelpiece struck the half hour, and as Lady Armitage concluded, I saw her put the ivory end of her fan before her lips and stifle a yawn. Really, if only on the plea of its being bedtime, I had reason to look after Salome, and I threaded my way between the tables and couches and pushed aside the velvet curtain. The light from the room made a little square on the encaustic tiles of the conservatory. When I dropped the curtain I was nearly in the dark, and my eyes being dazzled by the brilliant light of the apartment I had left, I could for the first moment distinguish nothing around me. To increase my discomfort my long lace sleeve caught in one of the plants and nearly upset it. I had to pause and extricate myself; as

I did so I heard some one speaking at the further end of the conservatory which was of considerable dimensions. Salome's voice was raised :

"You are all so unkind," she said, "you all misconstrue everything I do; it is very unfair and cruel. There's Mimi always lecturing me, and Cecil looks quite cross, and I mean no harm, it really is too bad."

"Salome," I called out loud, "are you there, Salome?"

There was a loud crash amongst the plants, some one had got into mischief, perhaps been startled.

"Oh, Mimi, is that you? dear, dear, I hope nothing is broken!" exclaimed a voice which was unmistakably that of Salome, only much more *piano* than it usually was. "I'm coming, Mimi. Oh, is anything spoilt?"

"No, there is no harm done," John Phillips said, speaking for the first time in my hearing; and he added, "I did not know you were there, Miss White."

"I have only just come," I made answer, struck with apprehension lest he should deem me an eavesdropper; "Cecil told me Salome was here, and I came to remind her that it is bedtime."

Salome crept up to me, and slid her arm through mine; I believe she half expected that I was going to pet and kiss her as we stood together in the dark, for she laid her head on my shoulder, and was very affectionate. But after all that had occurred I had no intention of doing anything of the kind—you may be sure of that! I said, shortly:

"Our crinolines do not admit of our going along here arm in arm, my dear, you had better walk forward. Lady Armitage is waiting for us in the drawing-room."

Salome drew her hand away with an impatient movement which told me that she was vexed. I heard her sighing as she went on, but I did not think she would have taken such a little rebuff so much to heart as she did. When she stood in the light of the drawing-

room, she had actually tears in her eyes. But only for a moment; the next she was giving a laughing answer to Sir Hugh's enquiry as to where she had been, with her eyes only a little averted, that the moisture in them might not be too apparent. Hastily she followed Lady Armitage's lead, and shook hands with everyone—no, not with everyone. John Phillips was at some little distance from her, and without even turning in his direction, she bent her head and passed out of the room.

The idea of Cecil fancying there could be anything between those two, why the very supposition was preposterous! Salome would not even go out of her way to wish him good night, and when John Phillips followed her into the conservatory, she had not received him with any pleasure, at least, judging by the few words of their conversation which came to my ears. For my part I believe he had been acting on the privilege of an old friend of the family, and warning her to be more discreet in her conduct, as her careless-

ness caused pain to Cecil and me. It might be odd of such a young man to take upon himself to do this; but then he was not like the generality of his age and class, he had such unusual good sense and discernment.

I made up for Salome's rudeness by putting as much affection and cordiality into my shake of the hand as I possibly could, and John returned the friendly feeling with a warmth that nearly wrung my fingers off.

I turned to quit the room, fancying the others had quite left me behind; John came with me to light my candle in the hall.

But, lo and behold, the hall had other occupants! Not Lady Armitage and Cecil, who were already ensconced in the bedroom of the latter, but that wilful child, Salome, who, with her back turned to us, and one hand on the carved banister, was waiting for Lord John Rayleigh to finish what he was saying, and give her her candlestick.

I see those two now, the pretty bright

figure, with its extensive skirts, relieved by the dark oak of the staircase, the hall lamps flinging a stream of light over her shining hair, white shoulders, and some glittering bugle trimming about her waist and sleeves; the plump, rounded arm and the small hand, which, with its burden of fan and handkerchief, rested so daintily on the rail.

She did not hear our footsteps as we trod along that thickly-carpeted floor, neither did her companion; but John dropped the silver extinguisher of my candlestick (as it seemed to me, purposely) on the marble slab of the table, and the noisy clatter it made caused Salome to start round with a flushed face, and Lord John to pause in what he was saying in that mysterious undertone, and hand the candlestick in silence to his companion.

Upstairs sped Salome without another word, and when I followed her the door between our rooms was fast closed, and she betrayed no inclination to open it. I undressed myself, wondering anxiously what

would be the wisest plan for me to pursue. If Salome meant and felt nothing, why of course my interference would only do harm ; but if, on the other hand, as I began nervously to apprehend, there were really an attachment between her and Lord John Rayleigh, it was plainly my duty to invite her confidence, as her mother might have done, and in every way I could, to prove myself the child's friend. Oh ! dear, dear, I was very miserable. In a worldly point of view there would be nothing to say against this marriage, but surely it could not prove a happy union, Lord John's peevish, yellow face, the fox-like expression of slyness in his small eyes, his thin, ill-tempered nose, spy-glass, affected manners, rose one by one to my memory. Just think of his being Salome's husband—think of her being tied to him for life—the mere thought maddened me !

Perhaps I misjudged him ; perhaps his heart was better than his face ; perhaps, as Mr. Desanges had said, if he got a good and

pretty young wife, he could settle steadily down to his duties and prove himself a valuable man; *perhaps*, only perhaps!—he might not, and then my Salome would be like her mother—a broken-hearted wife and a hopeless woman, with but this slight difference, that in her case she would have sold herself for money and position instead of sacrificing herself for love! Oh dear, oh dear; this is a cruel and wicked world, in which it is very difficult to keep to the right!

Did Salome care for the man, or did she not? I fancied she did, otherwise why need she keep him at her side, or listen to what he had to say, or ask him for his photograph? (Pooh, pooh! Miss White, all young ladies do that now-a-days, and it means nothing—absolutely nothing; it's a fashion, not a feeling—a taste, perhaps; well, at any rate why did she have that inexplicable *tête-à-tête* with him at the bottom of the stairs? That at any rate was unanswerable. Yes, no doubt she cared for him, and I supposed that she would marry

him ; the marriage would come off at once, of course, for there were no obstacles ; she would be a gay little titled lady, flung into the vortex of London society next spring, with, for her only guardian, a husband who had not three grains of sense in his head ! So I thought in my excitement and my anger ; and I was very angry.

Poor little Salome ! Pretty little Salome, with her merry, kittenish ways and her great love of fun and gaiety and nonsense ; think if she ever became like Mrs. Lushington ! Spare me ! If she did, I really think my heart would break ; had not her dead mother put her under my charge, committed her to my love, bidden me regard her as my own child ? Oh, dear, oh, dear ! and yet I had let her get entangled in Lord John's toils, without putting out a finger to rescue her ; I had stood aside while she lifted a childish hand to grasp the Ducal 'strawberry leaves' for herself ; she had, child-like, been dazzled by the gilding and jewels ; well, once upon a time I might

have warned her that, like the apples of the Dead Sea, the most tempting fruit of this world only turns to dust in one's mouth, bitter and nauseous to the taste ! Dear me ! if only I had brought up Salome to a wholesome liking for plain bread and butter, she might then have been content to help herself from a poor man's platter, instead of longing for rich viands, which were certain to disagree with her !

CHAPTER IX.

SALOME IN MISCHIEF !

"An excuse is worse and more terrible than a lie : for an excuse is a lie guarded."

POPE.

"In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish'd dove.
In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts
of love."

TENNYSON.

I MADE up my mind to go and wish Salome good night, and, if possible, to invite her confidence. I told myself that I would speak mildly to her, and conceal the indignation and anxiety which her conduct had awakened in my mind ; I would be gentle and forbearing with her, but I would tell her the truth.

So, scarcely waiting for an answer to my light tap at the partition door, I entered her chamber.

Evidently I took her by surprise, and she had not expected me, for there on the hearth-rug, with her dressing-gown but half on, crouched the child, sobbing as if her heart would break ; her eyes swollen up with tears, her hair streaming in every direction.

She started up angrily on perceiving me, with an attempt at averting her face ; and she asked in such a miserable, half-indignant voice what I wanted, that all my self-possession forsook me, I forgot what I had come to say, and melted into the tender, soft-hearted Mimi whom Salome ruled with her little finger.

"Dear child," I said, "I came to wish you good night. And now I fear you are in pain, or in trouble, or something ; let me see if I can't help you."

But no, Salome would not be helped, she pulled her hand away from me, and said that

there was nothing the matter, and she wanted nothing, that she was sleepy, and going to get into bed.

When young people adopt this unfriendly line in their troubles, and thrust away the sympathy that is offered them, it is very difficult for old maids to know what to say or do for the best. I stood irresolutely over the fire; and Salome, after a moment's hesitation, took refuge in the excuse of being tired, and got into bed, where from her extreme stillness and silence one might have fancied that she had fallen asleep in a trice. But I knew it was only a subterfuge, and that she was watching me from between the sheet and the pillow and speculating as to when my patience would be wearied out. Instinctively, my thoughts went back to that long-ago morning, when she had been frightened of remaining alone, and had asked me to summon Justine, when she peeped at me in much this same way, from the little bed which Cecil had helped to prepare for her!

My heart stirred at the recollection, and I came nearer the pillow and bent down to kiss her.

She turned away her head crossly ; but I knew that this was but a show of ill-humour, for the next minute I heard her sobbing under the bed-clothes.

"My darling," I said, "I can't bear to see you so miserable. Tell me what it is, and I promise to do my best to help you."

The sobs increased, but there was no answer.

"Salome," I said, gently, "have you given your heart away ? Don't be afraid of saying if it is so ? You know your happiness is the very first consideration with Cecil and me. We won't stand in your way, dear, if you are really attached, and if we have reason to think you are equally beloved—Salome, my child !"

"Go away," she cried, passionately, "go away, I'm not going to be pumped by anyone—who said I cared for anyone ? I don't, I

never will ; nobody cares for me and I won't care for anybody ! I won't !—now, will you go ?”

“ Oh ! do you really not care for him ?” I enquired, with an accent of relief.

“ Mimi, what right have you to ask such a question ? Let me alone, I want to go to sleep ;” and by way of putting her wishes into execution, the child burst out crying with renewed violence.

“ Dear, dear,” I said, “ you are the very strangest girl, Salome ; but you can't deceive me, you *do* care for him, my dear, and I suppose since it is so you will have to have your own way, and I hope and pray it may all turn out for the best. Don't make yourself so miserable, Salome ; Cecil and I will never reproach you, and you need not fear about him for we all know how attached he is to you.”

Her sobs ceased, and she seemed to be listening. I pursued : “ And you will try to preserve a true and pure heart when you are a grand lady, Salome, and ask God to keep

you from setting your mind too much on pomps and riches. I could not bear to see you grow careless and worldly, my child, and Lord John—”

Salome flung the sheet aside and started up in bed. “What do you mean, what are you speaking of?” she screamed. “You’ll drive me wild if you go on like this. Have *you* set your mind on taunting me as well as the rest? Go away, go away!”

Her vehemence half frightened, half displeased me; how very ungrateful she was when I was doing my utmost for her. Yes, I would go, and I did go, but I was cut to the heart. I closed the door with a bang behind me, and took no notice of a low penitent “Mimi!” which would have invited me to pause.

I went straight to Cecil’s room and told her everything. I spoke very indignantly when I described what had passed, but Cecil was disposed to be much more lenient; she sought

to disarm my anger and make excuses for Salome's conduct.

"Poor, dear child," Cecil said, "I had no idea her feelings were so deeply implicated, she is very much to be pitied, as *we* know, Mimi. And of course, if she were harassed and uneasy she would very likely be cross and miserable; we must be forbearing and seek to comfort her. Not that I think it is likely to be a trial of long duration, for Lady Armitage and I were speaking only just now of Lord John, and she was saying how unmistakable were his admiration and devotion. He leaves at the same time we do to-morrow; depend upon it the matter will be quickly arranged."

"Oh, but Cecil, you would not wish her to marry him!"

"Not wish it if she cares for him? My dear Mimi, what objection could we possibly raise; the match is suitable in every way?"

"But the man, Cecil, he is such a coxcomb!"

“Salome does not seem to think so,” Cecil said with a slight smile; “and she it is whose wishes have to be consulted. And really, Mimi, I think you are biassed against the poor man. Lady Armitage tells me that there has been nothing to say against him lately; when he was younger he was wild, which so many young men are, but he has been going on as well as possible the last year or two, and he has with all his errors ever proved himself a good son and brother. I see no grounds on which we could raise a reasonable objection, if Salome cares for him so very much. Poor Salome, one would not have thought that this would have been her choice, but people’s tastes are very unaccountable. I’ll tell you what, Mimi, if she marries him, I will make her fortune up to twenty thousand pounds, I always meant to do this if she married to our satisfaction, and now we will let no one say that our child has not a dowry worthy of her new station. What a famous

little Lady she will be, and how she will enjoy her dignity ! ”

The same vision was floating through my brain even then. I was thinking of the future Lady John Rayleigh, how grand she would look, how everyone would admire her, how gay she would be, last of all, what would Mrs. Egerton say ? Mrs. Egerton, who had always looked down upon our Salome, and treated her *de haut en bas*. For a moment I felt almost triumphant, and in a sort of mental panorama I saw myself introducing Lord John Rayleigh at Torrehill. I believe in my coldheartedness I was even making his brother's death a thing understood, and watching Mrs. Egerton's jealous eyes when I talked proudly of the Duchess !

But my reverie was broken up by a remark from Cecil which at once overthrew all the castles and left only melancholy ruins in their place. She said with a half-sigh, “I only feel sorry about Charlie Egerton — poor

fellow, he is so devotedly attached to Salome."

"Ah, poor Charlie! I had forgotten him altogether."

"Poor Charlie!" Cecil pursued in a feeling tone; "it is very sad for him, I know he will take it so much to heart. And we must feel so guilty in having had anything to do with raising his hopes and then blasting them. I think there can be no greater trial in life than to have given to another the purest and best place in one's heart, all in vain—worse still to find one's self superseded by another, especially if that other be our inferior in attachment, in mind or feeling. Yet over and over again in this world this is the case."

"Tell me," I said to Cecil, as a misgiving occurred to me, "did Lady Armitage make any remark about Lord John's supposed admiration for Miss Smythe, who was here the other evening; that is the only thing about the matter I don't like or understand; he

certainly was very devoted to her, and for that one evening altogether deserted Salome."

"Miss Smythe? Oh, yes, Lady Armitage told me all about it. It has been a flirtation of several years' standing—never was more, and is never likely to be. Lord John's mother does not like her, and Lady Armitage says she believes nothing would give the old lady greater satisfaction than to see her son united to such a girl as Salome; she is sure there will be no obstacle raised to the marriage by his family, at any rate. And, you know, Salome has a nice little fortune of her own, and is pretty enough to marry anyone she likes. Lady Armitage told me that she has been sedulously announcing right and left, that the young lady is an heiress, so that nobody may think she has the best of the bargain. You know you and I should be terribly annoyed if it were reported that Salome was marrying for position."

"Of course."

"And she isn't, you know, for she really cares for him."

"I hope so."

"How can you doubt it? Girls don't behave in that inexplicable way, except they are in love."

"Don't they?"

"Oh, Mimi, give over teasing."

"I'm not teasing, and I'm going to wish you good night; we shall see our way more clearly to-morrow."

But to-morrow we did nothing of the kind; we were still as much in the dark as we had been before, and try all I could, I could find no solution for Salome's conduct, which hour by hour grew more contradictory and inexplicable. There was no understanding the child, and no means of arriving at the truth about her feelings and wishes, for she passionately repulsed any advances towards confidence and intimacy. She avoided *tête-à-têtes*, took refuge in a wild unnatural gaiety when she was down-stairs, and in long fits of de-

pression when she fancied herself unperceived.

She never opened the door between our rooms all the time she dressed, and when I tried it just before going down to breakfast, it was locked. Justine met me as I was on the stairs, and said; "Miss Fielding begged I would not wait for her, she was rather late, but she should follow me in a few minutes."

She made her appearance as we were sitting down to breakfast, and, as by accident, the vacant place that had been left for her was at Lord John's side. She came into the room, making some sort of little apology, shaking hands with Lady Armitage as she passed her, and then seating herself with a general bow, which included everyone. John Phillips sitting between Cecil and me, rose as she entered, and seemed to expect to be noticed, but she never paid any attention to his outstretched hand, and scarcely looked in his direction when she bade "good morning."

"Ah," thought I to myself, "the offence of

John's interference rankles still, does it, Miss Salome? You resent being found fault with, even by an old friend; well, perhaps it was a mistake on his part, but I don't like one of my children to be so unforgiving!"

Lord John was in high spirits, he, of course being Salome's next neighbour, shook hands with her, and got her everything she wanted, and talked to her incessantly, making himself very agreeable indeed. At first, as it seemed to me, Salome was unusually pale and grave; she made no remark of her own accord, and only answered in monosyllables; but by and by, chancing to glance up quickly, when Lord John was playfully rallying her on her abstraction, I saw her eye meeting that of my neighbour, John Phillips. I saw Salome start and colour violently, and then begin to laugh and talk even more merrily than was her wont. And yet I could guess from the fluctuations of colour on her cheek and her steady avoidance of everything and everyone on the other side of the table, that she was not so

easy or happy at heart as she pretended to be, and that somehow or other John Phillips was connected with her discomfort.

"So, so," I murmured under my breath, "you don't want John to have the triumph of supposing his good advice has made any impression on you ; you don't want him to think that you pay the least regard to anything he chooses to say ; you suppose yourself a very spirited and independent young woman, don't you, Miss Salome ? But I am by no means so sure that I think this conduct redounds to your credit."

Nay, I grew very angry indeed with Salome as I watched her. How she laughed and dawdled, with what provoking smiles she replied to all Lord John's soft speeches and attentions—and he was desperately attentive, I must say ; he went farther than ever this morning ; he seemed inspirited beyond measure by the favorable reception which Salome gave to his civilities. I really thought he was appropriating her already, and began

uneasily to surmise that there might be some understanding between the two, of which I was unaware; think of that—think if Salome had actually engaged herself without saying a word to me, who stood to her in the place of mother! oh dear, dear, what an ungrateful world this is!

We were not to set out for the station till half-past twelve, the train not leaving till afternoon, and having given Justine directions about our packing I went down again to the drawing-room, with my work in my hand. Mr. Desanges had gone, Lady Armitage was with her children; I had seen Sir Hugh and John Phillips together in the library as I passed, and the drawing-room for occupants had only Cecil, who was stitching away industriously at a long muslin frill, (she hated fancy work) and Salome, who, with Lord John leaning over her, was fidgeting the knick-knacks and photographs on the round table, and talking rubbish with somewhat less than her usual zest.

Salome glanced up eagerly at the sound of the door opening and as quickly dropped her eyes, when she saw that it was only I who came in. At the same moment Lord John rose with a murmur about having forgotten something or another and left the room almost as I entered it. Scarcely was he out of sight than Salome threw herself back on the sofa with a very significant though scarcely complimentary yawn.

I glanced uneasily at Cecil. She met my gaze, raised her eyebrows with an expression of scarcely pleased surprise, and after a pause, whilst Salome's little head still nestled amongst the sofa cushions, asked playfully :—

“Are you sleepy, Salome? You had better go and rest if you are, for you will have hard work at the ball to night.”

“No, I shan't,” Salome answered rather sharply, “I shan't know anybody who'll be there, and Lady Armitage says that there is always a crowd at the Hunt Ball, and no pleasure in dancing, and that one gets

squeezed into a corner and scarcely sees a person that one knows ; I am sure if I had known about it before I should not have cared to go."

"I am sure it is a pity then we did not know," Cecil said in her quick way, "for if you don't care to go, much less do I, and if we had stayed quietly at home we should have been spared a great deal of needless trouble and—" Cecil paused abruptly.

She never said that word *expense* before Salome, lest it should seem to imply a reproach to her.

"I don't think however, that in spite of the Ball to-night threatening to be dull and crowded, you would have liked to decline the invitations here and to York, would you, Salome?" I asked with a smile.

Her joyous expression came back to the child's face, and she laughed out loud, pushing the yellow hair away from her temples to the immediate destruction of Justine's handywork.

"What a sagacious, old Mimi you always

are! Of course, I like the fun of the thing and mean to enjoy myself. Anything is better than being poked up in the dingy old Abbots."

Opposite to me Cecil's brow grew cloudy with vexed feeling; she never could bear to hear her home disparaged. I tried to turn the conversation.

"My dear Salome," I said, "you have no idea what a fright you have made yourself—do look at yourself in the looking-glass."

She started up, and with a merry laugh confronted her own reflection in the opposite mirror. I had called her a fright for lack of a better word, but mine was a curious term to apply to that smooth childish face, whereon the soft pink of the cheeks blended so exquisitely with the pure, pearly whiteness of the forehead, in turn toned down by some just perceptible purple veins which the transparent skin could not conceal—to those silky masses of fair hair which, escaped from their net, were floating in disorder over Salome's

shoulders, or to the long wavy curl tucked behind her pretty little ear, which displayed to so great advantage the graceful curve of her long neck.

"Do run up and tidy yourself, Salome," I continued, as the child, far from displeased by her survey, pushed her hair back from the other ear, and declared that she would adopt a new style of hairdressing. I could not endure such pride and vanity as she was displaying, looping up her curls, now bringing them forward, now flinging them back, finally seizing the yellow masses between her two hands, tossing them up in the air, and letting them alight where they would and could.

"What a child you are, Salome, you'll want a pinafore soon ! There, what do you think Mr. Phillips will think of this nonsense and vanity ?" for to my surprise someone had laughed out loud when I was scolding, and I had looked up to find John Phillips coming in through the anteroom.

Down came Salome's two arms which had

been upraised in mischief, down came the wavy yellow locks in the most picturesque confusion, and the glimpse I caught of her face as she flew out of the room revealed her to be rosy red with shame and dismay.

I could scarcely help joining in John Phillips' very hearty burst of merriment. Even Cecil smiled as the fluttering, bright garments disappeared through the doorway. She looked up from her sewing with the bright needle between her shapely fingers, and her mouth fairly relaxed at the sight of John's amusement.

"Salome is always such a child, there is no teaching her to behave herself," I said excusingly, when I recovered my breath.

"Yes, she is so perfectly simple and unaffected, it is quite amusing to watch her," John answered.

I glanced round to see if he were using sarcasm, but his face was still smiling, his clear, grey eyes twinkling with amusement.

Cecil grew grave again, and as she bent

over her work I fancied I heard her sighing.

"Well, about her freedom from affectation I am not so sure I agree with you," I said jealously. "Simple she is most assuredly, far too simple in some matters, but she is affected every now and then, I must allow. She puts on no end of airs and graces just on purpose to tease us, doesn't she, Cecil?"

Cecil said nothing, and John only bit his lips. I began to feel convicted of harshness to the child; she was but a child after all, and old heads are not to be found upon young shoulders; and I do not know but that I should have attempted some justification of myself and her had not our confidential talk been put an end to by the return of Lord John Rayleigh.

He glanced round the room, evidently seeking Salome; he did not ask for her, but he took a turn round the conservatory, and not finding her there, reappeared in the draw-

ing-room and took possession of an ottoman near the door—he was waiting for her.

I thought that John Phillips might have entered into conversation with him, but as he seemed disinclined to do so, and somehow I didn't want to be rude to Lord John for Salome's sake, I tried to rectify the omission. I moved the angle of my chair, even though by so doing I lost the best light for my work, and began to look about for an appropriate topic for conversation. This expedition to York rose first to my memory, and I seized on the subject.

"I suppose we shall all travel together as far as York," I said in my pleasantest company tones.

"Yes," he answered, "I've to go a mile or two further on." There was a pause, after which he added, "It is a great bore, but it can't be helped."

I smiled facetiously. "What? having to endure our company so far, or to go the extra distance?"

"Oh, Miss White what a shame!" and for once the lisping tones were discarded, he spoke in a natural, manly voice, and did not put up the spy-glass—to be sure it was only an ugly old woman to whom he was talking.

"What a shame—of course I meant neither, only the having to leave this pleasant party at all. I know I shall be bored to death at Egremount. The people are cousins of my own, and as heavy as lead, five very plain unmarried daughters and an invalid son. I can't think what made me tie myself to them."

If he did not know, much less did I, so there was nothing more to say about the matter. I smiled—single ladies always smile when they wish to be agreeable and are at a loss for words!

He drew a china plate towards him, and then examined the pretty knick-knacks which it contained. As he did so, my eyes were riveted by the splendid diamond ring on his little finger—pshaw! my thoughts went off

in a gallop to our Salome, wondering if the family jewels were very handsome and how they would become the little lady!

"At any rate we shall meet at the ball to-night, and that's one consolation," he began again; "and I'll tell you what, Miss White, keep near the upper end if you can; you'll go early, won't you? There's always such a crowd that one has the greatest difficulty in finding one's friends, unless one knows where to look for them. The upper end of the room is much the most pleasant, and far the most convenient for going in to supper, do get Lady Armitage to station herself there."

"I'll try;" and I really felt inclined to try and please him. I was beginning to think that after all Salome might do worse, and to fancy that perhaps I had been hard upon the poor man; Cecil had said that I was too severe.

Well, I sought to make myself very agreeable to him, though, I am afraid I did not perfectly succeed, for my companion from time to time betrayed signs of weariness and

impatience; he kept looking at the clock on the mantel-piece and then at the door, and if there was a sound in the hall, he glanced round anxiously, as though he were expecting someone.

All this time Salome was absent—up in her own room, I suppose—and I really did feel quite vexed with her for keeping out of sight; wern't we going away in a very short time, and was not this very curious behaviour if she cared for the poor man?

CHAPTER X.

LORD JOHN'S PHOTOGRAPH, AND HOW WE
WENT TO YORK.

"Smiling, frowning, evermore,
Thou art perfect in love-lore,
Revealings deep and clear are thine
Of wealthy smiles! but who may know
Whether smile or frown be fleeter?
Whether smile or frown be sweeter,
Who may know?
Frowns perfect, sweet along the brow
Light glooming over eyes divine,
Like little clouds, sun fringed, are thine
Ever varying Madeline!"

TENNYSON.

THE twelve o'clock bell rang, and immediately afterwards Lady Armitage sent to summon us into the dining-room, where an early luncheon was prepared. I proposed

going in search of Salome, but little Charlie, who was swinging on the banister of the staircase, stopped me.

"She knows, Miss White, she's coming, she's been playing with us in the school-room."

And presently she did come, already equipped for her journey, with a bevy of little boys around her, and Margaret Armitage triumphantly carrying her travelling bag. Again she was seated next to Lord John, and we had a repetition of the scene at breakfast.

"Well," thought I, "this must soon end, one way or the other—be patient, Mary White!"

Ah, but my patience was to be sorely tried! I was leaving the room to get my walking things, when I saw Lord John, who was standing by Salome, in the bay window, pull a little pink envelope from his pocket and give it to the child, saying, "You kindly expressed a wish for that; I am afraid it is

not a very good print, but you shall have a better one in a day or two, if you care to have it ;" despite his affectation even I could hear that there was a trembling of real feeling in his voice.

I could not resist stopping to pat the curly head of little Charlie, who was hunting a half-starved fly across the window-pane, still less could I resist an anxious glance and an anxious ear in Salome's direction.

She put out her pretty little hand in the most listless fashion, took the envelope so very, very slowly, carelessly drew out the photograph, and said ;

"Oh thank you, it will do very nicely. I have such a famous collection of my friends now, almost everybody that I know anything about ; thank you, it is a very good likeness !"

Of course he looked blank ; of course he felt disappointed ; if he were one amongst so many the compliment was of little value. He looked flushed, began to stammer, and Salome listened to him with the most provoking

coolness and self possession, as she held the photograph up to the light and examined it critically.

What was I to think of the child? Could I attribute her conduct to innocent unconsciousness, cold hearted cruelty, or a rare and laudable self-command, which would betray nothing until it were assured of its own happiness? Truly, I was puzzled, and glancing round I saw that not alone was I an interested and perplexed spectator of the scene, all the others had not left the room as I had supposed; John Phillips had been giving Willy a last ride on his shoulder in the hall, and pausing beside the door, was now looking straight in, looking straight at Salome and Lord John in the window opposite. There was something in the expression of John Phillips' face which startled me, though I could not tell what it was.

"Gee-up—gee-up!" shouted Willy, drumming his fat little leg, against John's chest

and hitting him hard with a pair of rounded fists. "Gee-up," and John went on again, out of sight, in more ways than one.

"I—I think you were kind enough to promise that this might be an exchange—you know I should value a—a likeness of you so very much—I—"

"Oh dear, I'm so sorry," Salome answered, dusting her little finger across the photograph as though she were removing an accidental blemish, and looking up at her companion with a pair of blue eyes so ingenuous and innocent; "I'm very sorry, but I've given all mine away!"

I literally started; had not I done my best to bring up the child to be truthful and God fearing, yet here she was telling as deliberate a fib as was ever invented? To my sure and certain knowledge she had three or four very pretty representations of herself in as many different attitudes in her writing desk upstairs; she might not have been able to get

at them just at this minute, for Justine's packing was finished, but she certainly possessed them.

"My dear Salome!" I exclaimed with an accent of astonishment.

Lord John looked scarcely gratified by the discovery of my presence. Salome only smiled most amicably when my gaze met hers.

"No, dear Mimi, I haven't, indeed," she said softly; "if you remember, I gave one to Cliff the other day, and then I sent one to Mr. Scott, and I've promised Lady Armitage and Charlie a couple, and the last is bespoken."

"But more can easily be obtained, my dear."

Lord John saw that I was coming out in a friendly light, and he bestowed on me a glance of unspeakable gratitude.

Salome shrugged her neat little shoulders.

"No, I don't think I shall have any more," she said, half pettishly. "I don't like any of them really, and I won't have more printed."

I'll wait till we go to London, and be taken again."

"Oh, Miss Fielding, how can you be so hardhearted," Lord John began, "surely you will relent. You know you promised me one last night.

"No, indeed, I didn't, Lord John. I only said, if I have one, and I find I haven't."

She stopped short with something like confusion, for I was looking at her with all the reproach I could put into my eyes.

"Miss White, intercede for me," Lord John said, appealing to me.

I answered quickly:

"I'll do more than intercede, Lord John. If you really care to have the photograph of such a spoiled and petted child, I'll give you the one I have, and take my chance of getting another. Salome will find one for me somehow, I've no doubt."

He said "thank you" rather eagerly, and looked anxiously at Salome. Truly, it was no wonder that she puzzled him. But Salome

had averted her face, and pressed past me with more of real displeasure and annoyance in her manner than I had ever before known her to betray.

"Charlie," she said, laying her hand on the urchin's shoulder, just as he was in the act of capturing the fly; "come along with me, and let us finish our game in the school-room."

She led the way, and a tramp of little feet made the chorus to her steps in the passage.

Lord John turned to me with a very bewildered face.

"Surely I've not vexed her, Miss White."

"Never mind," I said, "she's not really vexed; it's only her manner, and she enjoys teasing us all. But there—I declare the carriages are coming round, and I have still to put on my bonnet."

Yes, and I had still to give Salome a blowing up, when and as opportunity should serve!

But the opportunity did not easily present

itself. She was not in the same carriage with me when we drove to the station, and the train being crowded by a host of grand people all bound on a like errand with ourselves, our party was divided; Salome was in one compartment with Lady Armitage and Lord John, and the rest of us were in another. I had not even the relief of seeing how those two parted, or if they behaved as friends, lovers, or enemies. There was a great throng of smart folks and smarter servants on the platform when we alighted, and round the luggage van a crowd jostled, and pushed, and claimed boxes, portmanteaus, and carpet-bags with shrill pertinacity, and a total lack of civility.

We were within five minutes' walk of the Great Northern Hotel, where apartments had been engaged for us, and all of our party announcing the same dislike to cabs, we proceeded there on foot, being momentarily arrested on our way, by this and that acquaintance of the Armitages, who must stop and

shake hands, and express pleasure at meeting with them, and in most instances Lady Armitage introduced her friends to us.

Now we were outside the station ; we had to wait at the crossing for a butcher's cart and a couple of cabs to drive past ; then, after a few steps along the pavement, which the damp atmosphere had dyed to a purple hue, after another crossing, we were at the door of the tall, dingy looking Great Northern, and Lady Armitage was exchanging civilities with the pleasant-faced landlady, in black silk and gold spectacles, who came forward to receive us.

We were shown to our rooms. Perhaps, dear Reader, you have been in those same rooms, for some other Hunt Ball, or, perhaps you may be there on some future occasion. If you are, you will doubtless recognise the cheerful sitting-room, with pretty engravings on the walls, the walnut furniture, the feather flowers of some unknown species, red, lilac, and yellow, which ornament the tall vases on

the mantel-piece ; the stuffed parrot under the glass shade in the corner of the room, the careful preservation of which seems to imply some story connexion with its owner. If ever you examine these things on a rainy day—and in York nearly every day is rainy—perhaps you will think of our visit there and our history ; of Cecil, Salome, and John Phillips.

What a weary evening that was ! We dawdled over dinner as long as we could, and we went up early to dress, but in spite of everything the time hung heavy on our hands, and conversation flagged. Salome seemed to have come to an end of all her frolic and mischief, and sat silently on a little sofa by the fire, tearing up old letters and converting the strips into lighters. Sir Hugh and John Phillips kept up a prosy argument about the poor laws, in which Lady Armitage and Cecil were supposed to be interested, for from time to time one or another of the gentlemen appealed to them. I was desperately

sleepy, and had besides that bad headache always consequent (with me) on a journey by railroad. Over and over again I dropped off into unconsciousness and was awakened to a sense of my indiscretion by my head nodding onto my bosom, or an unwary grunt, nearly allied to a snore, which startled me back into decorum, and made me sit bold upright in my chair, with widely opened eyes and a little dry cough, not altogether free from deceit.

At length we went upstairs to dress. Salome and I were to share the same room, a long narrow apartment with a French bed at either end; Cecil was next door to us, and if I went once across the six feet of stair carpet which separated the chambers, I went fifty times at least before both my children were decked out to the best advantage!

I will not bother you with a description of their dress, but they looked *so nice*. Lady Armitage said so, and I thought so, and John

Phillips, when they came down, looked as though he felt so. I had just one or two words for Salome before we finally left our room.

"My dear," I said, when Justine closed the door behind her, and Salome, standing before the glass was arranging some last minutiae of her toilet; "My dear, I don't want to find fault, I'm not angry, now don't take offence; I am not going to scold you, Salome, but you'll try and be a good kind girl to-night—you'll not hurt any one's feelings if you can help it? or you'll—"

"Don't," she said with a petulant movement of her shoulder which displaced the hand I had laid on it, "don't begin to lecture, Mimi, I'm not in the humour for it to night."

"But, my dear," and my voice was louder and my grasp more determined, "you really must just listen to what I have to say."

Salome sank down into the nearest chair,

with an air of affected resignation, putting up her little, white hand as though to entreat forbearance.

"I am sure, Salome, you are too kind, willingly to give pain to anyone; you have naturally a good heart, and half your errors arise from thoughtlessness; but indeed, my child, you must not trifle too long or too far. Do you not know that what seems to you only fun may cause irremediable sorrow to another, may possibly reflect a shadow on yourself? Salome, if I did not love you I should not be at the trouble of saying all this, I should let you take your own way; I should not care about your bringing misery on yourself; but now, because I do love you so truly and so dearly I cannot help endeavouring to point out to you the dangers and temptations which lie about your path."

"Oh dear, what have I done?" Salome enquired in a softened voice, for the child did not like to see me unhappy; "I am sure I mean no harm."

"No, of course you don't. And I know besides that when you care for people you love very really and devotedly—there, am I not right, little Salome?"

She only bent down her head and seemed to be intently examining the rich chasing of her bracelet.

"But with what a woman loves, Salome, it is never wise for her to trifle. Love is too precious to be played with. You know, dear, you have been rather foolish lately. Ill-natured people who do not know you as well as I do might even say that you had been *firting*."

I coloured when I said the word. Salome looked up and laughed out loud. "But what do you call *firting*, Mimi?"

I had flattered myself I had made an impression on her, and instead of that she was speaking in an amused voice and actually laughing!

"I mean," I answered hotly, "deceitfully encouraging people by a pretence of interest,

or liking, to express affection or admiration which we cannot reciprocate, acting falsehoods in order to gratify our vanity or self love ! When young ladies flatter gentlemen by constantly listening to them, singing the songs they ask for, allowing them to engross all their time and attention, asking for their photographs and that sort of thing, and yet deliberately purpose to say *no* if their interest should be construed into something deeper, I call them flirts, as I should call you, Salome, if you ever did such a thing, meaning nothing, which God forbid ! ”

I cannot say that Salome's face expressed any particular pleasure as she listened to me ; on the contrary she looked vexed, and when she spoke it was in the petted tone which betrays an uneasy mind. She took my words straight home to herself, and answered in the first person.

“ I could not help taking Lord John's photograph when he brought it to me, you

needn't blow me up so, Mimi, it was not my fault. And," with tears in her eyes, "I don't want the photograph, I don't care to have it, I'll burn it now if you like, it is in my bag over there !"

"Nonsense, my dear," I said, and in turn I felt inclined to smile. "I'm not referring to that, there's no harm in your having the photograph, and there would not even be harm in your acknowledging *to me* that you valued it. Your saying so would not make me think any the worse of you, dear child, perhaps indeed, I should prefer your doing so to screening yourself by equivocation."

"Mimi," she exclaimed, starting up angrily, "you don't mean to say you think there is anything between me and — !"

"The carriage is at the door, and Lady Armitage is asking for you, mesdames," Justine said from the doorway ; and as she came forward to take possession of Salome's opera cloak, the child's tirade was cut short in the

midst, rather to my discomfiture ; but no, surely she had not meant to say she did not care for Lord John Rayleigh !

All the party were waiting for us in the sitting-room. John Phillips helped Cecil to put on her cloak, Justine performed the same office for Salome. Then Sir Hugh gave his arm to Cecil, and Salome and I followed them down the stairs, Lady Armitage and John Phillips bringing up the rear.

The flys stood at the door, the entrance was bright with gaslight ; three or four smartly dressed women servants were stationed to see us pass and to criticise our dresses. There was a brighter blaze of light from the glass-fronted bar, with its rows of glittering glasses and bottles, above which beamed the landlady's pleasant face ; then I was safely packed into the first fly with Cecil at my side and Sir Hugh opposite to me, and we were rattling along the street.

All York was astir. Late as it was the pavements were thronged ; here a shop was

lighted, there the vision of a cross street with its rows of lamps flitted before us; that dark, heavy building was a church, the corner gaslight illumined some crowded headstones and a few feet of dingy-looking turf—human beings were sleeping there, men, women, and children, who had once enjoyed life as we were doing, who had eaten and drunk and been merry in their little day; but who were now resting, as we also should rest one day soon! Such is life! We passed their graves when we went to our place of festivity!

We were crossing the bridge. Dimly through the mist I could distinguish the sluggish-looking Ouse, washing along its way, the low buildings thronging its banks, a few twinkling lights here and there. We had turned the corner and were in Coney street, driving noisily over the stones, houses and shops on either side, faces close beside us on the pavement, a man selling oranges, a boy with nuts, a haggard woman wrangling with a policeman, a throng of lads, some noisy girls, pert

and insolent. When, on joining the string of carriages, we had to go slowly, pausing every three minutes, we had ample time to look about us. Sir Hugh pointed out to us St. Helen's Church, and this place and the other, for Cecil and I were alike strangers in York; beyond occasionally passing through it we knew nothing of the city.

At last we were at the Assembly Rooms. A policeman opened the carriage door, we were in the carpeted entrance, in the lobby, finally in the cloak room, where we were to await Lady Armitage's arrival. There was a lively-looking old woman with sharp features, ticketing the various cloaks and wraps committed to her charge, two or three myrmidons assisting her; several parties were evidently like ourselves, awaiting the arrival of friends with whom they were to enter the ball-room; one lady, very thin, very smartly attired, and decidedly *passée*, was turning herself round before a cheval glass, arranging the folds of her skirts. A young, happy-faced girl, whose

complexion looked as though she had just come in from a walk over the moors, was submitting to have her hair smoothed by a stout lady, evidently her mother, who was anxiously, yet admiringly surveying her from head to foot—surely this was the damsel's first ball.

But amongst such a throng of people, how can I pretend to discriminate. There were short ladies and tall ladies, young and old, fat and slim, happy and care-worn, pleasant and disagreeable; people who gave themselves airs, on what pretensions I wot not, somebods and nobodys; I sat on a sofa in a corner and watched them all.

Presently there came in some one I knew, at least by sight. There was no mistaking the Honourable Miss Smythe. She was very grandly dressed and she looked tall and commanding. She remained but one moment in the room, and then departed on the arm of a gentleman who had waited for her in the doorway. She did not seem to recognise us.

At last appeared Lady Armitage and Salome—the latter in a state of eager excitement, which every delay from that long string of carriages had increased. She heard the valse music in the ball-room, and the mere sound made her anxious to dance. She would scarcely allow me time to pull out her creased skirts, and put her headdress straight, before she was at Lady Armitage's side, wanting to proceed.

We were on our way to the ball-room now, passing before the table at which were the clerks to whom our tickets were to be given up, and who seemed very anxious to put down every one's name correctly—we each had a programme in our hands; I amongst the rest—did anyone think that an old woman like me was going to dance? But I kept the programme to show Mrs. Cliff; I thought she would like to see it, and it had such a pretty device on it—a jockey's cap and whips, and a fox and things, emblematic of the hunt, I suppose.

I had told Lady Armitage of Lord John Rayleigh's request, and she very good-naturedly, as soon as we got into the room, endeavoured to work her way to the further end. What a crowd there was! I had not been prepared for anything so bad. Every resting place was occupied; dowagers crowded the seats between the pillars, crowded the benches behind, stood with groups of young people around them in every available corner—poor dowagers, who smiled and tried to look happy, who introduced their charges to all the gentlemen acquaintances who came near them, who said over and over again that it was a delightful ball, but all the time seemed ready to drop with fatigue or long standing.

It was hopeless to try and reach the further end of the room at present; we were quite glad to find standing ground by the pillars which separated the larger from the smaller ball-room. Lady Armitage knew the old gentleman who was grouped next to her, and she and he began to talk together; he was

white-headed—too stiff to dance, so even though Lady Armitage introduced him to her charges, his acquaintance was little benefit to them. Salome looked excessively pretty, and a great many people evidently noticed her as they went past; but alas! she knew nobody, and so could not be asked to dance—poor child, it was very provoking for her, for of all things she enjoyed dancing.

She stood upon tip-toe and tried to catch sight of the dancers, but there was such a crowd before her that she could only see the tops of their heads as they whizzed past. How aggravating that beautiful music was; it almost set one off dancing by one's self.

Next, the Lancers were formed, and John Phillips having engaged Cecil as his partner, they moved away together, and Salome was left alone at my side, impatiently toying with her fan and bouquet. Well, I really was quite sorry for her, it must have been so disappointing for her to be left out when every one else was dancing. She was too impatient

even to derive amusement from watching, as I did, the people pass to and fro; she scarcely paid attention to my remarks, scarcely listened to that beautiful music which in itself was quite a treat. The orchestra was nearly opposite to where we stood, Coote and Tinney's band filled it; what a number of musicians there were, and how energetic were the movements of the leader; it must have been a hard night's work for him, poor man!

At last, the Lancers were at an end too; the music ceased for a few minutes, and in its place there was a hum of voices quite bewildering. Couple after couple went past where we stood, enjoying tête-à-tête before the young ladies had to be restored to their *chaperones*; rich dresses brushed us; there were ceaseless misfortunes to long trains; torn flounces, remnants of flowers natural and artificial, strewed the floor, and were swept onward in the skirts of some fresh passer. The ladies looked flushed and hot, and fanned themselves vigorously, and the gentlemen

bent their heads down to them and consulted their programmes, or wrote their names on those of their fair companions. Really it was great fun to watch it all, I should have enjoyed the scene immensely, had it not been for the too evident discomfiture of my child, Salome. She was so restless, so strangely uneasy, she kept looking hither and thither as though seeking some one—the thought rushed upon me at once, she was looking for Lord John Rayleigh! Now I understood it all, her depression from the time he had left us at the station, her silence during the evening, her curious way of talking to me; she was unhappy and uneasy at being away from him, she could not enjoy herself now because he was not here!

What a goose I had been not to discover the truth before!

I wished it had been possible to have moved to the further end of the room as he had asked me to do; but our doing so was out of the question now, for Lady Armitage

had at last found a seat near some lady friend, and was deeply engaged in conversation with her. In vain I sought Lord John in the crowd, I could not find a trace of him.

A waltz succeeded the quadrille. Cecil came back to us, and John Phillips went off somewhere else. He had engaged another partner, no other as it proved than Susan Egerton. I saw them dancing together a few minutes afterwards, and I think that I felt momentarily disappointed he had not chosen Salomé instead, she would so thoroughly have enjoyed waltzing to that delicious music !

Cecil said that the room was so crowded, there was really little pleasure in dancing ; and she contentedly stationed herself against a pillar and began to exchange comments with me. But she was not long to remain idle ; Captain Leopold Egerton, suave and conceited as ever, pushed his way to her side, and, as she was not engaged, begged for the honour of dancing this with her. Of course, she had no excuse. She had to accept his

proffered arm and leave us. Salome at my side heaved a very significant sigh. I told her how sorry I was we could not find a partner for her also, and she answered pettishly, "she didn't care to dance, the room was so hot and crowded!"

But she did dance at last. At the conclusion of his waltz with Cecil, Captain Leopold asked Salome for the next, a Polka, and when she came back her face was brighter, and she seemed quite inclined to be merry and enjoy herself. She had met Lord John and she was to dance the next galop with him.

I saw that her programme had more than one name written on it, and I bent down and tried to decipher the hieroglyphics. Captain Leopold had introduced her to one or two partners, and Lord John's name was down for more than that one galop.

"Are you going to dance this quadrille?" I enquired of her.

"Yes," she said, and her face was averted. "I am to dance it with Mr. Phillips."

From this time my charges had no reason to complain of a lack of partners; they danced nearly everything, and when they returned to my side, in the intervals between the dances, there was generally either a bow to pin, or a crushed flower to pull out, or something or another which gave me constant employment, and left little time for conversation. I did not see much of John Phillips; I suppose he was dancing. Once again, before supper he danced with Cecil, never with Salome, as I could see by her programme.

She danced once, twice, thrice, with Lord John, and he looked very happy. I began to feel very important and speculative. When the supper-room doors were thrown open, there was one general rush forward. Lady Armitage had been carried off by some one; Salome was, I don't know where; and Sir Hugh offered me his arm, and we followed as closely as we could behind Cecil and a young officer with whom she had been dancing the last dance.

How the people pushed, how they crushed, talk of the miseries of crowds, there is no crowd to be compared to a fashionable crowd striving for the best places in the York supper-room !

I was positively taken off my legs; I had to put up my hand to save my cap from annihilation, a fat dowager in the rear nearly stifled me, the thin dowager just before shoved me back with her bony elbows, somebody else's bracelet tore the lace of my sleeve, a man's heavy foot came plump down on my corns. I was buffeted, pommeled, squeezed, jostled, and would twenty times rather have gone without my supper than have been subjected to such persecutions.

But Sir Hugh was a resolute man; he pushed forward as boldly as any one; he begged pardon and moved before this person, smiled and took precedence of some one else; he pulled me along perforce with him, and fairly laughed when he caught sight of my

terrified face and the vain efforts I made to recover my breath.

He knew the best position for seeing everything and everyone, and he straightway conducted me to it. Before I knew where I was or had half recovered from my bewilderment, I was sitting at the highest tier of tables at the farther end of the supper-room, and Sir Hugh was helping Cecil into the seat beside me. Below was a moving crowd, surging in through the open doors with a hum, hum, like a swarm of human bees. All the tables in the gallery above, below us, opposite to us, right and left, were rapidly filling. Amongst the plants and shrubs which ornamented the orchestra facing the gallery, a number of red-coated musicians were stationed, playing the most inspiring airs. How the plate glittered, what an opening of champagne bottles there was; people were crowding in, here, there, everywhere; such a buzz of voices! I was positively confused and dizzy

with the crush, and the bright lights, and startled violently when Sir Hugh handed me a plate and asked if I took soup.

It really was a very pretty sight, and I soon became thoroughly amused in watching the crowd. We were in a first rate position for observing all that passed, and could recognise many of our acquaintances in the throng below. Susan Egerton was at a very short distance from us, looking so unusually animated, that she was almost pretty ; and that was her sister Louie to the right, talking to an officer in some dragoon regiment.

Sir Hugh stood beside us and pointed out several of the York or county celebrities. "Did we see that very small lady over there? The one with red in her hair, and whose dress had something about it of orientalism? That was one of the *belles*, her eyes were splendid and she had such pretty little features—did we admire her? And the short, dark man a little further on was the well known Mr. So and So, the celebrated something or another,

still better known about here as a kind hearted, generous philanthropist;" and forthwith Sir Hugh launched into anecdotes illustrative of the stranger's benevolence to the poor and sick, of his efforts to relieve the sufferings of his fellow creatures.

"Now look at his next neighbour," Sir Hugh went on; "he is about the smallest man in the room, and he may generally be seen dancing with the tallest women. That lady at his side is very handsome, is she not?—and tall enough, eh? You don't see her to advantage there, but when she gets up you'll admire her figure, and her head is so well placed on her shoulders—oh, and you must not miss seeing Duleep Singh—there he is, he'll pass in a moment, how curious his eastern dress looks amongst this crowd of English people."

I looked up eagerly to see the Indian Prince, and as he stood just opposite to us I saw him well; his handsome small-featured face, the glittering jewels in his ears and

about his dress ; he was scarcely darker than a Portugese, and in other costume might easily have passed for an European.

Sir Hugh was attracting my attention in another direction—that pretty-looking girl was the daughter of one of the Prebends, that tall man with his back turned to us, was a celebrated Crimean officer. It was not Sir Hugh's fault if we did not see everybody and everything worth seeing !

I had succeeded at last in finding Salome. She was sitting at one of the tables in the gallery, and her companion was no other than Lord John Rayleigh. So far as I could judge in the distance he and she were having some rather earnest conversation, I wondered what they were talking about !

Cecil, at my side, seemed rather grave and thoughtful, and when Sir Hugh's silence at length furnished me with an opportunity, I spoke to her. I had missed John Phillips. I had expected that he would have taken her in to supper, and I felt rather aggrieved that

he had not done so; perhaps Cecil felt the same. After seeking in vain to discover where he was, or if he were in the supper-room at all, I whispered to Cecil: "What can have become of John Phillips?"

"He is there," she returned, and her eye travelled to the sea of heads round the door. Amidst the throng I could distinguish no single individual, but her eyes must have been keener than mine, for when I reiterated, "Where," she pointed out to me a far-distant pillar against which stood the dark figure of a man.

She was right; it was John Phillips. I saw him more clearly as he came forward; but I could never have recognised him as she did. She told me afterwards that she had known him the moment he came through the doorway.

What is it that makes some young people's vision so keen?

CHAPTER XI.

THE HUNT BALL CONTINUED.

"Call me false, or call me free—
Vow, whatever light may shine,
No man on your face shall see
Any grief for change on mine.

Yet the sin is on us both—
Time to dance is not to woo,
Woer light makes fickle troth—
Scorn of *me* recoils on *you*."

E. B. BROWNING.

WE were amongst the first to return to the ball-room. Cecil and I appropriated one of the pleasantest seats at the head of the room, and sat there talking. Beyond a few couples walking about, and an odd flirtation or two going on behind the pillars, the ball-room

was deserted. Sir Hugh called our attention to the merits of the building, pointed out the new mode of lighting the room and the decorations; finally proposing that I should walk round with him before the dancing recommenced. He and I accordingly went off together; past the refreshment counter, past various groups of people, down to the bottom of the room, and back again. We looked into the smaller ball-room as we passed, and here finding Mrs. Egerton, I was obliged to remain for a few minutes and shake hands, and (I am afraid with a little mischievous triumph) to introduce Sir Hugh Armitage! On our way back to rejoin Cecil, I caught sight of a figure so exceedingly like Salome, that, on some pretence or another, I made my companion retrace his steps, and conduct me in front of the pillars behind which I had seen my supposed Salome disappearing. When I found what I was interrupting I felt more provoked than enough with myself; there were Lord John and Salome in the most

engrossing conversation, he, very eager, she, with her head bent down.

I would have turned hastily, and gone out of the way ; but I was too late ; Salome had seen me, and the next instant she was at my side. I never saw Salome look so nervous, so miserable ; she seemed on the brink of tears. Lord John followed her, looking equally foolish.

“ Where have you been, Mimi ? ” asked Salome ; “ I looked for you everywhere and could not find you.”

“ I have been walking round the room, and now we are going back to Cecil, who is sitting near the door.”

“ I’ll come with you, Mimi,” and she kept very close to my side.

Lord John offered her his arm.

She did not seem to see it. She made him a dainty little bow of farewell, and slipped her arm within that of Sir Hugh. None of us spoke as we walked up the room. When we were at length seated beside Cecil, and Sir

Hugh had left us, I looked at the child, and saw that her face was burning, and her eyes swimming with tears.

"What is the matter, dear?" I asked, fondly, and with a great deal of uneasiness in my mind; "are you not well?"

"Oh! nothing, only my head aches, and the supper-room was so hot;" and Salome, with the proud reserve which contrasted so strangely with her customary frankness and childishness of manner, gulped down a sob, and the next instant was making some quizzical remark on a lady near us, but in a hollow voice that smote through my heart.

What a curious child she was, so open in her enjoyment of happiness and pleasure, so confiding, so eager for sympathy and affection when her world was sunshiny; but so reserved in her troubles, so jealous of any one's detecting her sorrow or trial. I began to think that there were depths in Salome's heart which I had not yet sounded.

What had happened? [—I fancied that

Lord John Rayleigh had been proposing to her ; but if so, why did she look so miserable and unhappy ? Surely, surely, it could not be that she had not really cared for him ; her speech of that very evening about there being nothing between her and somebody rose up to my mind—oh, surely, she could not have refused him ; she could not have been merely amusing herself all this time ; she could not have been flirting !

The music recommenced. Cecil and Salome both went off to dance, and I was left sitting alone. Lady Armitage did not rejoin me for some time. Salome was engaged for everything ; many people, struck with her beauty, had asked to be introduced to her, and she was quite one of the stars of the evening. She accepted partner after partner, and remained scarcely a moment at my side ; the cloud had passed from her face, she was smiling and enjoying herself as usual ; and far from looking unhappy, her eyes and com-

plexion seemed to have gained an unwonted brilliancy.

Very anxiously I watched for her to dance again with Lord John Rayleigh, but in vain. I could not see him anywhere; John Phillips too, seemed to have disappeared almost as mysteriously! he never came near our party; he was not dancing, and I never saw him but once during the remainder of the evening, and that was when Cecil and Salome were dancing in the set of Lancers, just in front of where I sat. I looked up hastily, and discovered John Phillips amongst the throng of spectators who stood opposite, and his forehead was contracted, and he seemed to be watching anxiously and intently. Again I said to myself—

“How odd it is, that if he is so jealous of Cecil’s dancing with other people, he does not himself ask her oftener.”

When the dance was ended, and I looked for him again, he was gone.

Salome came back to me for a few minutes. She had torn her dress, and it wanted pinning up. I gave her a pin, and held her fan and things while she was busy. I turned round her crushed programme, and looked at the names on it; these Lancers she was to dance with a Mr. Cator, who was he, I wonder? The initials against the following galop were those of Lord John Rayleigh.

"Are you beginning to feel tired, yet?" asked Lady Armitage of Salome.

To my surprise this child, who had always professed herself impervious to fatigue, said yes, with great eagerness, and demanded when Lady Armitage intended to leave.

"We shall have hard work again to-morrow night, you know," Salome said, as if in explanation, when she met my eye.

"Cecil is dancing this polka, I see," said Lady Armitage, "when she comes back I'll tell her that you are getting tired. I believe you are right in reserving some little strength for to-morrow night."

Mr. Cator came to claim Salome; brought her back when the Lancers were at an end, and she stood talking to him at my side. Cecil did not return; I saw her with another partner waiting for the galop to commence.

"Now for Lord John Rayleigh," thought I, "I shall see the meeting, at any rate."

But the galop began, and he did not come. Leopold Egerton was speaking to Salome, evidently asking her to dance; now she had taken his arm, and the next instant I saw them flying down the room together. I was fairly perplexed.

A fat, fair dowager, attended by tall, and decidedly plain girls, paused at Lady Armitage's side, and entered into conversation with her. I did not hear her name, and her appearance was not interesting, but nearly the first words she uttered arrested my attention.

"It is really very annoying of him going off in this way; he was our only gentleman to-night, and we always leave early. There

is no one to order our carriage, or anything."

"I wish I knew where Sir Hugh was, he would be most happy, I am sure," began Lady Armitage.

And when she added—"I had no idea that Lord John Rayleigh had left already," I saw that the perplexity in my mind was extending to hers.

"Yes, he is gone; he left a message with the servant that he was not feeling well; I wish he had come and told me himself, and then we could all have gone home together. Oh, there is my nephew, Henry Godolphin; I'll ask him; how very fortunate!—Good evening."

And the dowager's diamond head-dress and fat shoulders were bent forward in adieu, and her three daughters likewise bent their high, white wreaths and bony necks, and rustled past us.

"How very singular! what can have oc-

curred?" Lady Armitage said to me in an anxious whisper.

To which my sole reply was "Very."

"Hasn't Salome danced with him several times this evening?" asked my companion in the same undertone.

"Three times at the very least, and she went in to supper with him, and I saw them talking together afterwards."

"How very extraordinary! But perhaps he has really been taken ill."

"Or it may be only an excuse," I answered.

Lady Armitage sighed, perhaps for the failure of her innocent scheme matrimonial.

We left soon after this. John Phillips made his appearance at the last moment.

There was a grand hunt in the cloak room for the packet which answered to our ticket, and the old woman, who waited there, was very sleepy, and excessively cross. I think we must have awakened her up from a nap.

There was some delay before Sir Hugh could gain possession of cabs for us; the cabmen wrangled, and the policemen tried to keep order; but at last, after endless calls of Lady Armitage's carriage stopping the way, and endless journeys into the draught, which always resulted in seeing someone else taking possession of what ought to have been our fly, our party were safely stored in a couple of shaky vehicles, and being driven back to the hotel.

Now the streets were dark and deserted, there was not even a light in the houses about the Ouse, and our closed glasses gathered a film of heat, and we leant back in our places, weary and silent.

Again we were going up the Hotel staircase; the gas there was as brilliant as before, but the inquisitive maid-servants were dispersed, asleep may be, in the garrets up-stairs. The landlady came out of the bar to see that we had all we wanted, and a waiter brought us some lighted bedcandles.

We remained for a few seconds down-stairs exchanging remarks about the dances, the people and the music. Then there was a round of hand-shaking, and we went up to bed.

I accompanied Cecil into her room and stayed there, helping her to undress, Justine being engaged with Salome. We had a long conversation about John Phillips, and also about Salome and Lord John Rayleigh. I was late in returning to my chamber, and by that time Salome was in bed, apparently too sleepy to talk, so I only kissed her and said *good-night*. But long after I too was in bed, I knew that she was awake ; I heard her sobbing under the bed-clothes.

I was silent. She thought I was asleep, and I heard her giving way to a great burst of sorrow.

I could not bear that—if she were so very unhappy, I must comfort her, and I started up in bed and spoke.

There was no answer. I repeated her

name; she was trying to appear asleep; she did not sob again—she could not bear to have her grief detected, and I laid my head back on the pillow and mused long and sadly. How could I help the child when she would not even reveal to me the secret of her trouble?

I slept very little, and when the grey morning light stole through my window, I got up and dressed as noiselessly as I could. Salome was fast asleep, and she did not even rouse when I left the room.

I was the first downstairs. A waiter was laying the breakfast things, and I took possession of the sofa and the “Idylls of the King,” which Cecil had bought yesterday, and amused myself till the others came down.

Cecil made her appearance with the rest. There was to be a Choral Service in the Minster this morning; the organ which had been restored, was to be opened for the first time, and the Bishop of Oxford was to preach. Sir Hugh had obtained tickets of admission for us. Cecil had always been anxious to go to the

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Service, but Salome had cared less about the matter; and Lady Armitage agreed with me that it would be a pity to rouse her from her sleep: she had better wait till the afternoon, when we should be going a second time to the Minster.

We were to start as soon as breakfast was over, and I went upstairs to get my walking things. Salome woke when I went in, and sat up in bed, rubbing her eyes and wondering how she had managed to oversleep herself. I rang and sent Justine down for some breakfast for her, and then I had to shield myself from the child's reproaches, she being *put out* because she was not able to accompany us. When I was dressed, however, and departed downstairs, I left her eating her breakfast with considerable relish and pretty well reconciled to her disappointment.

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CHAPTER XII.

AN AUTO-DA-FE.

"Learn to win a lady's faith
Nobly, as the thing is high ;
Bravely, as for life and death—
With a loyal gravity.

Lead her from the festive boards,
Point her to the starry skies,
Guard her, by your truthful words,
Pure from courtship's flatteries.

By your truth she shall be true—
Ever true as wives of yore—
And her Yes ! once said to you,
Shall be Yes for evermore !"

E. B. BROWNING.

THE choral service was very interesting, and the Bishop of Oxford gave us an admirable sermon. Lady Armitage and Cecil afterwards went to visit some old friends in the Minster-yard, and I hurried home to Salome.

She was not in the sitting-room when I went in ; there was a bright fire, and the cloth laid for lunch, but not a sign of the child's presence.

I went upstairs to her room, and there she was. She evidently had not heard my approach till I opened the door, and then she started up from the hearthrug with as guilty an expression as it is possible for a child's face to wear.

"Dear me, Mimi," she exclaimed, "how soon you are back ! I did not expect to see you home for an hour to come ; where are the others ?"

It struck me that she kept her extensive skirts carefully spread out before the fender, and my curiosity was excited. I came nearer the fire, remarking,

"So you have got a fire, I see ; were you cold ?"

"Justine would light it for me to dress by. She said the morning was so raw and chilly."

"Justine was quite right. But have you

only just got up? I found the sitting-room altogether deserted."

"I didn't like sitting down there all by myself when the waiter was constantly coming in and out to make up the fire, and I'd nothing to amuse myself with."

"Did you find more amusement up here?" I asked with a smile.

Salome coloured crimson, and looked so extremely foolish that I was more and more puzzled. Awaiting her answer, I drew nearer the fire and spread out my chilled hands to warm them. Salome had a pair of scissors between her fingers, which she was twirling rapidly to and fro, and on the mantelpiece there were some clippings of white paper.

The grate was a new-fashioned one, low and circular, and the fender corresponded with it. Glancing down at this last now, I saw the very funniest looking array on its flat surface that it is possible to imagine; something that looked like rows of paper figures

with a carte-de-visite portrait propped in the centre.

"What's that?" I asked quickly; and I stooped down to gain possession of the portrait.

"Oh nothing, don't, oh *don't!*" and Salome darted her hand down to seize it before me. But I captured her wrist before she had done more than overturn a row of paper figures, which fell down against the bottom of the fender with a very un-paper-like rattle.

"Nonsense!" I said laughing, "you have been after some mischief; let me see;" and even as I spoke, I discovered the photograph which Lord John had given to Salome yesterday; but no longer intact, a long, black hair-pin had been forced through the upper part of the card to make it stand upright.

"My dear child," I inquired, "what have you been doing?"

Despite her evident annoyance, Salome laughed—laughed long and heartily. I was too puzzled to be merry.

"Well, if you must know, Mimi, I'll tell you, but don't scold. I wanted something to amuse myself with, and I thought *faute de mieux*, I'd have an auto-da-fé!"

"An auto-da-fé, my dear child!"

"Yes, Mimi, look here, there's the victim, and that's the stake, and you see the billets of wood and paper. I should have burnt him long ago only I could not do so without some priests and executioners, and I was cutting these out and propping them up with hair-pins when you came in. You know

'Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.' "

I was silent with amazement and dismay. I glanced up at Salome; she did not look feverish, or I should have thought she was delirious. Just imagine a girl of nearly eighteen playing at such a babyish game, above all things think of a woman burning her beloved one in effigy! I could scarcely believe the evidence of my senses!

"What is the matter, Mimi? you look quite scared?"

"I—I don't think I understood—you were not going to burn him?"

"Not him, but his picture! And it is such a capital likeness, too. Just give it me, and I'll show you it all. The paper billets will blaze famously, for I dipped the ends of them into the pomatum pot.."

"Stop this minute, Salome, are you crazy? Good gracious, child, what has come to you?"

"Nothing at all. Why, Mimi, one would think I was burning Lord John himself."

"But, Salome, you'll never get another of those photographs, very likely."

"Well, I don't want one. I didn't know what in the world to do with this, till the bright idea struck me. You scolded me about it, and I didn't want to keep it, and I would not put it in my book. I wish you had not come home in such a hurry."

I sank down in the nearest chair, and covered my face with my hands.

"Oh, dear, what am I to think, what am I to believe? why, I always thought you were in love with Lord John."

"I—Lord John—in love—you must be raving—what could put such an idea into your head? I hate him—I owe him such a grudge as I sha'nt pay off this long while," and Salome's eyes flashed quite defiantly. "What in the world made you think I cared for him?"

"Why, your own conduct and manner, and everything; and he was so devoted to you. We all thought it, and no wonder."

"All, what do you mean?"

"Why, who that saw you together could mistake the state of the case? We all thought it. Lady Armitage, and Cecil, and John Phillips, and everyone. Mr. Desanges actually congratulated me."

"Mr. Desanges is—I won't say what, and I don't believe Mr. Phillips thought anything of the kind."

"He did though, I'm sure; we all did. Oh,

Salome, if you did not care for the man, you have been behaving dreadfully."

"I haven't," and she burst into tears.

"You are all so unkind to me."

"Nay; I think it is you who are unkind."

"I'm not; I could not help myself. I can't be rude, and if people will misunderstand me, they must. I couldn't help listening when Lord John spoke to me. I should have listened the same to anyone else. And if I flirted, didn't he do just the same? What do you think of his conduct to Miss Smythe?"

"I think far worse of your conduct to him. You have led him on and on, and to my belief he is devotedly attached to you, and will take the first opportunity of proposing. Oh, Salome, I am afraid you are a sad, heartless girl; you have lowered yourself in the eyes of all the world."

"No, I haven't," she screamed passionately, "other people must know better. I never liked him, I never encouraged him, I saw

him flirting with Miss Smythe, and I thought he meant to do the same with me ; and if he did I didn't care ; his nonsense amused me, and I never dreamed he would go further."

She was tearing the photograph to pieces ; but I made no effort to rescue it now. Just to fancy all this ;—dear me—what was to be done ?

"What will Lady Armitage say ? I wish we hadn't come here ; we can't go to the ball to-night, and meet him. The deception must be kept up no longer. Oh, Salome, what trouble and disgrace you have brought on us all !"

"He'll not be at the ball, to-night, it is not likely. Now, don't be in a way, Mimi, he really brought it on himself, and he has been more bother and plague to me than enough. I can't hear his name without a shiver, and—well, I wish I could have burnt him—that's all."

"He'll not be at the ball, do you say ?"

and a light suddenly dawned upon me.
“You don’t mean to say that he proposed to you last night, and you refused him—eh, Salome?”

She only put down her head and began to cry very heartily. I went on—

“And you never even told us, Salome, and I believe you wouldn’t have done so now, if I hadn’t asked you, point blank. Oh, I didn’t think you’d have been so deceitful.”

“I’m not deceitful,” the child answered angrily; “and, I’ll tell you what, Mimi, it is with no will of mine, that you or anyone else knows it now. I don’t think women have any right to go and tell these things to all the world. I won’t! I should have been very sorry for Lord John, and have kept his secret better, if he had not so richly deserved his punishment.”

“Oh Salome, trying to throw the blame off yourself in that unfair way!”

“I don’t think it is unfair,” quoth Sa-

lome, "I never knew he was making up to me or I'd have treated him differently. Didn't I see him more devoted than enough to Miss Smythe, and Mrs. Lushington told me he had flirted with her in that way for no one knows how long; I thought he meant to treat me just the same, and you don't suppose I was likely to give him my heart when I thought that; oh dear no, I take far too good care of myself! I'll never love anyone I can't trust! I assure you, Mimi, I never was more taken aback in my life than when he proposed; I had no idea he meant to do anything of the kind, and I told him so. I told him I fancied he had only been playing over again with me his old game with Miss Smythe, and that I was sorry—I could not do more. And I *am* sorry if he is really hurt, but it is his own fault, if he hadn't behaved so to Miss Smythe I should never have paid him off in his own coin."

We were silent for a few minutes. After

revolving the subject I said, "And do you mean to say you had no idea when we were staying at the Armitages', that he was becoming attached to you?"

"No, I hadn't indeed. I thought he was growing rather unpleasantly *empressé* that last day, and I was vexed when you promised him my photograph. But I never dreamed of his proposing to me."

Her tone was so truthful that I could not help believing her.

"But even supposing you were so blinded, Salome, you must allow that you went greater lengths with him than a prudent girl should go with any man for whom she has no liking. What in the world possessed you to dance so often with him before supper last night, and why did you accept his attentions?"

She grew very red :—

"I was not going to sit out when everyone else was dancing, I like dancing too much for that. If pleasanter people did not think it

worth while to ask me, I was forced to dance with those who did. Lord John thought me worth dancing with at any rate."

There was an unmistakable tone of pique in her voice, I could almost have called it *jealousy*. One might have supposed from her manner that there had been present last night some one with whom she would have preferred dancing had he given her the opportunity, and that she liked to show to this said, unknown *him*, that in spite of his neglect she could find appreciation elsewhere, perhaps she had been trying to awaken his jealousy! But who in the world could this some one be? I was fairly perplexed. My next remark had apparently no connection with its predecessor.

"Excepting Lord John, all the people you danced with last night were strangers, weren't they?"

"Yes, with the exception of Leopold Egerton and John Phillips," and she obviously blushed.

Leopold Egerton! Could it be? Oh dear

me, how unfortunate, surely she did not care for him? Yet there certainly was an old admiration on his part for her, despite his proposal to Cecil, and now that Salome was a fortune, Mrs. Egerton would be only too glad for her son to marry her—well, to be sure!

Very little more passed between Salome and myself. I heard the rest of our party come in, and I knew that luncheon must be almost ready. I wanted to speak to Cecil about what had occurred, and having taken off my bonnet and tried ineffectually to check the passionate grief of this naughty child, who repulsed my every advance, and kneeling down by the fender was one by one burning her little paper executioners and the remnants of Lord John's photograph, I left the room, and met Cecil on the threshold of her chamber.

Of course I told her all and everything. Acting on her advice, I afterwards proceeded to Lady Armitage's room and repeated the same history to her.

Lady Armitage could not help laughing at my description of the *auto-da-fé*. But in common with Cecil and myself, I think she was sorry that this little affair, in which we had taken so much interest, should have come to an unfortunate termination. We were all rather angry with Salome, Cecil especially so, which was somewhat remarkable, as she was wont to be so very lenient to her sister. However there was nothing to be done, Lady Armitage was quite of Salome's opinion, that under the circumstances Lord John would not come to the ball, and she strongly urged the expediency of our making no change in our own arrangements, saying that if we did so we should only attract suspicion to our party. Then our council being broken up by a summons to luncheon, we went downstairs together to the sitting-room.

Sir Hugh asked where Salome was; and after waiting for a few minutes in the hope that she would descend of her own accord, I went upstairs again to seek her.

She was bathing her poor red eyes with elder-flower water, and I had the greatest difficulty in prevailing on her to accompany me downstairs. When she crept in behind me, so silent and pale, and with such tell-tale traces of trouble on her face, I saw Sir Hugh glance questioningly to his wife, and John Phillips's countenance express surprise, concern, and distress. Salome evidently wished to escape observation, and we instinctively recognised this and avoided speaking to her,—poor child, I saw that she was very near choking over the roll which John Phillips handed to her.

Sir Hugh observed that if we intended going again to the Minster we had little enough time to spare, and I asked Salome in an undertone if she would like to go. She said yes, and Cecil and John Phillips agreed to come too. Lady Armitage was tired and wished to remain quiet, and Sir Hugh had business with some one and was unable to join us.

Very soon then we started for the Minster. Salome, as it seemed to me, shrank from my side; perhaps she thought that I alone knew her secret. She kept close to Cecil, and as we walked along the pavement these two got in advance of John Phillips and myself. John was looking anxious and puzzled, and on the first opportunity he asked me what was the matter with Salome. I suppose I ought to have invented some excuse and have let the subject drop, but I could not; he asked so kindly, and the story ran so much in my head that it was quite a relief to tell it, especially to one so sympathizing and interested. Besides, I had so much reliance on his sense and good judgment that I thought he might be able to advise me. So very circumstantially, as we walked along, I related to him all that had occurred, and what I had discovered, and what Salome had told me. I think I told him nearly every thing. He was wonderfully interested; he asked me innumerable questions;

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he startled me by using some very strong language in reference to Lord John Rayleigh, and by taking Salome's part most warmly. He only wondered I could ever have wished her to marry such an ape, he had no idea we had entertained any such scheme, he—but he grew so eager and excited that I was fairly bewildered, and came but to one rational conclusion, viz., that there must have been something very objectionable indeed about Lord John Rayleigh, if good John Phillips so cordially disliked him,—perhaps after all it was as well that Salome had refused him.

“Of course it was evident to everyone how much Lord John admired her,” John Phillips said, “how could he help doing so? At times one felt anxious, too, lest his very great devotion should make any impression on her. But I never knew that you and Cecil were reconciled to anything of the kind, never, I thought—I fancied—but never mind—you are quite sure she does not care for him at all?”

"Quite sure—oh, there is not a chance of their making it up. It is a most unfortunate business."

"Come, it might be worse, Miss White," and John Phillips' smile seemed to say that he at any rate was not heartbroken. "I think you and I have been at cross questions and crooked answers as well as other people ; at least I seem to have misunderstood you somehow. We must have a talk together when we can manage it."

He was looking straight before him on the pavement to where Cecil and Salome were walking together. I knew who and what he was thinking of. I glanced up with a reassuring smile, and said :

"Ah ! but that is a very different matter, something more serious and reliable than this last unhappy affair. No, I have not misunderstood you, I know all and I wish you happiness and success."

He turned round to me with a puzzled ex-

pression on his face, and would have spoken, but Cecil had stopped and was appealing to me, "Mimi, which is the way, I've forgotten; do we go straight on, or turn to the left?"

So our *tête-à-tête* was interrupted, and we had no more conversation on the subject.

When we reached the Minster, the door was locked, and there was a great crowd upon the steps, and around the little gate through which those who had tickets to the choir were to be admitted. At length, punctually as the clock struck, the policeman unlocked the doors, and then we were pushed along, jostled, squeezed; it was nearly, but not quite as bad as the going in to supper of last night.

The service was scarcely equal to that of the morning, though the building looked very grand and the music was fine. Salome, whose feelings had been so much overwrought, found it overpowering, and she had tears in her eyes nearly all the time those beautiful Psalms were being chanted, verse and verse alter-

nately by the white-robed choristers. Poor Salome! this was almost the first time in her life that she had been in trouble.

But, to be sure, sorrow never dwelt long on her mind. From the time of leaving the Minster her spirits gradually rose, and by evening she was laughing and making funny speeches just as usual. John Phillips, who had very evidently been pitying her all the while, took every opportunity of paying her attention and amusing her,—he was always such a good-natured young man! He sat beside her at dinner, and spent nearly an hour afterwards in pointing out to her choice passages in Cecil's "Idyls of the King," and Salome was wonderfully sweet and affable to him, and did not make any pert speeches or use any slang words, or in fact do any of the naughty things for which I had lately been finding fault with her. I should have said she was really a very well-behaved girl that night. But not so thought Cecil.

Pity me, oh, reader! pity an old woman,

who has two impetuous girls to manage at one time! Pity me, when I found Cecil pacing her room upstairs with clenched fists and stormy face, vowing that Salome was everything that was wicked, and disagreeable, and deceitful, that she was actually trying to entrap John Phillips just as she had before entrapped Lord John Rayleigh, and that she would cast him off in the same way, only to amuse herself.

Vainly I argued—vainly I sought to reassure Cecil; she was frightfully excited and jealous, and she would not hear one word of reason. She would not go into Salome's room, she would not speak to her, she would not even let me speak to her. I wanted to go straightway to Salome and tell her how matters stood between Cecil and John Phillips: but no, Cecil seized me by the arm, and reminded me of my promise to tell nothing without her permission; "she was not going to put herself into Salome's power—no indeed!"

And so I could do nothing, only feel dreadfully aggrieved and unhappy.

We went to the ball. Salome was right. Lord John did not come, and Sir Hugh heard that unexpected business had summoned him to London. Miss Smythe was there again, and once or twice she stood quite close to us, but she cut us dead. *Her* jealous suspicions had been aroused at any rate. Salome had no lack of partners and looked just as pretty as ever, perhaps a shade more so, for her liveliness was a little subdued, and when she was in one of her gentle humours, she was irresistibly loveable. She danced several times with John Phillips, and also several times with Leopold Egerton, and came home declaring that she had never enjoyed a ball so much in her life.

Cecil said far differently; she had been keeping up a great strain of self-command all the evening. By a profession of fatigue she had sat out a good many dances.

John Phillips had only asked her twice, and the second time she had unfortunately been engaged to some one else. She was very wretched when I went to help her to undress ; declared that John Phillips did not care for her, and when I strove to argue to the contrary, revealed her jealousy by pointing out the dances he had danced with Salome, and the solitary set of Lancers he had danced with her.

“ But he asked you again and you were engaged, dear ? ”

“ Yes, but there were lots of dances afterwards for which he might have asked me if he had liked. Oh ! no, Mimi, I see the state of the case quite well, I know who I have to thank for it all.”

“ Oh ! Cecil, don't be unjust to Salome.”

“ I'm not unjust ; it is the truth ! ”

“ You are wrong indeed. And, dear, you can't think how unhappy you make poor Salome when you repulse her as you did

just now. You might have given her a kiss."

"Oh! I couldn't for anything, her mere touch would have burnt me!"

"Hush, hush! I can't tell you how sorry I am that there should be even a momentary ill-feeling between you. Salome, who knows nothing of the truth, cannot imagine how she has displeased you, unless it is that you are angry with her for refusing Lord John. She asked me about it as soon as we got into our room."

"Nonsense, she knows well enough!"

"I am sure she does not. And how can she when you won't let me give her a hint? Cecil, Salome may be thoughtless, but she is very fond of you, and you will be greatly to blame if you repulse her affection, or allow any misunderstanding to arise between you?"

"It is all her own fault, she should not flirt so."

"I never saw her flirting to-night. But we had better not talk about this, for if we do

we shall only disagree. You are tired, dear, and you look as if you had a headache?"

"Do I?" and she passed her hand wearily across her forehead.

"Mimi," she asked, after a moment's hesitation, "do you know at what time John Phillips starts to-morrow?"

"No, I've not the least idea. But I must try and get a few minutes' conversation with him before he goes. He told me he wanted to speak to me."

"To you, what about?"

Her curiosity was excited, and I sat down and told her what he had said to me about *her, of course*. She wanted to hear all, and I told her everything, putting a very strong construction of my own upon his words. Here I was at mischief again, repeating everything to everyone, and repeating according to my own ideas and my own wishes. Alas, alas, what mischief women can do with their tongues!

Throughout I had the best and kindest in-

tentions, I only wanted to see both my dear children well and happy ; I wished to forward their interests in every way I could ; alas, my interference only created sorrow and mistakes ! Oh ! mothers, chaperones, sisters, take warning, don't overdo the matter for your charges ; and above all things don't talk about it, don't on any account repeat one person's words to another—*mind you don't !*

Salome chose to reverse the order of things the next morning. When I awoke she was half dressed and laughing at me. She was downstairs at least half-an-hour before I was ready.

Breakfast was on the table when I got down, and, at Sir Hugh's request, Salome was making the tea ; Lady Armitage's maid waited at the door to take up her mistress's breakfast. Cecil also had overslept herself.

John Phillips startled me when he said that he must leave us at eleven o'clock, in half-an-hour's time in short, for the Egertons were

going to leave York early, and he was to accompany them. I made an excuse to take Cecil another cup of tea, that I might tell her of this unexpected arrangement; and when I came back I kept hoping and hoping that Sir Hugh would leave the room, when I might have sent Salome away on some errand or another, and have had a few minutes' conversation with John.

But Sir Hugh sat still to the last, and when the hour struck, John rose to take leave.

"Oh! can't you wait a minute or two longer?" I said, hurriedly, when he held out his hand; "Cecil will be down directly, and she will be so sorry to miss seeing you, and saying 'good-bye.'"

He shook his head, but looked in my face with a smile full of meaning. "It is only good-bye till to-morrow morning, if you will give me leave to come over to the Abbots then. We," he paused, and with heightened

colour substituted an *I* for the *we*. "I want to speak to you particularly, may I come early?"

"Whenever you like," and I nearly wrung his hand off in my cordiality. "It is *au revoir* then." My eyes were glistening, and I looked another way that Salome might not discover my emotion.

John looked back from the open door—"Miss White, you'll be sure and say Good-bye to Cecil for me, and tell her that I was very sorry to have to go away without seeing her this morning."

I bent my head in reply and tried to smile. I could not speak, this great happiness had quite overset me.

Salome darted forward — "Mr. Phillips, you are leaving your umbrella," and she ran out into the landing to give it to him. There was a sound of whispering voices outside the door, some one was going downstairs, and when I called Salome I received no answer; the child had gone up to her room.

A few minutes later I followed her there. I was in the chamber before she even heard me coming, for she was kneeling down by her bedside with her hands clasped and her face buried in the coverlet.

"Dear me," thought I to myself, "she is saying her prayers. I am afraid she forgot them in her hurry this morning—that was very naughty."

I coughed, and she started up surprised, and rather confused, but not guilty, oh, not guilty at all! She blushed a little, but her face was smiling, and she turned round and flung her arms round my neck.

"What is it, dear?" I said, kissing her. "Take care, you are crushing my collar."

But she did not relax her grasp for all that; she put her cheek close to mine and whispered, "Oh, Mimi, I'm going to be so good!"

Ah, she was becoming sorry now that she had vexed us in that matter of Lord John, and this was her way of asking pardon. I

kissed her again and said, "Never mind, dear, it is all for the best, and you'll try and do your duty now, won't you?"

She said very low and softly, "I'm sure I'll try."

That was a dear girl after all!

When I left Salome I went to Cecil's room and gave her my version of all that had occurred down stairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW JOHN PHILLIPS PROPOSED.

"As rust corrupts iron, so envy corrupts man."

ANTISTHENES.

"'Tis a dreadful thing to ponder,
Whether true love heard aright.
Did he say those gentle things
Over which fond memories linger,
And with which she cannot part?"

L. E. L.

It was the morning of the following day and we were sitting at breakfast at the Abbots. Without the windows there was a snow-clad scene; we had found snow awaiting our arrival, and it had snowed incessantly all last night. Now the lawn had a smooth white surface on which the sun shone glaringly, the

evergreens were caked with snow, and the window showed a high ridge of white peering in through the lowest panes. Overhead the sky was clear and pale blue; it was a frosty winter day.

Cecil sat at the head of the table. The servant had just brought in the letters, and there was a long, closely written sheet from Mr. Scott, detailing the circumstances of his last visit to Mr. Claridge in London.

Save that Cecil's dress was more carefully arranged than usual, there was nothing in her appearance to indicate that this day was to be a marked era in her life, and that she knew it. Her face was pale but perfectly calm; she spoke on indifferent subjects; when the steward came to her on business she received him in the library with an unruffled brow, and gave him her undivided attention.

Salome was so different. One might almost have thought that the child was in the secret and excited by it, her manner was so restless,

her spirits so high. She could eat no breakfast; she was constantly at the window, looking up the drive, as though she expected some one; she was overpoweringly affectionate to Cecil and me, and when I found fault with her she was immediately so humble and penitent that I did not know what to say to her next.

We went to the drawing-room, and together read the psalms and lessons for the day, as was our custom. Then we each set about our ordinary occupations as though nothing out of the common way was going to happen. Only for a minute I stole from the room, and told the servant that if Mr. Phillips called he was to be shown direct into the library.

Ten o'clock struck,—eleven,—I began to grow uneasy. John Phillips was such a good walker, and he must be so eager to come to us, I wondered that he should be so late!

An irresistible desire impelled me to get Salome out of the way,—was she not always

doing and saying the wrong thing at the wrong moment? She had better not be present when he came.

I said to her:

"You've not been to see your chickens yet, my dear, suppose you get your hat now and go, the fresh air will do you good."

She looked at me enquiringly, but only said "very well;" and getting up she put by her work and went in quest of her walking attire. Presently from the drawing-room windows we saw her tripping down the garden, her skirts trimly tucked up and her short scarlet petticoat looking very bright against the snow. Now there was only her footsteps to be seen, a long zig-zag chain in the centre of the path, and I came back from the window and sat down beside Cecil. I should have spoken to her on the subject nearest my heart, but she checked me authoritatively.

"Hush! Mimi, I can't bear it, we have spoken of this too much already. God grant that we have not made a great error!"

I would have protested, explained, re-assured her, but no, she looked up at me with her great, searching, brown eyes and asked, "Do you not feel that there is a strange contradiction somewhere, something for which one cannot account; he saw me many times when we were at York, what hindered his speaking then?"

I could not answer her. I had sometimes myself felt puzzled about it, but of course he could and would explain all now, it would all be right!

Twelve o'clock—and still no John Phillips had made his appearance. Cecil's face grew of a set pallor; I felt desperately excited, but all I said was, "It is a long way from Torre-hill here."

Half-past twelve struck, and Cecil rose from her chair.

"I wonder Salome has not come in, suppose we go and join her."

"Hadn't we better wait half an hour longer?"

"No, I think not," she said, decidedly. "I have a headache, and perhaps a walk will relieve. I am going to get ready. Will you come?"

Of course I went ; but I left word in which direction we were going, that John Phillips might follow us when he came.

We went out by the garden door, taking the direction of the shrubbery and the poultry yard. But Salome was no longer there ; the snow was a good deal trodden down about the gate and footsteps went on beyond it, down the shrubbery path. Salome had been there, and some one else had been with her. A man's firm, strongly marked steps could be tracked along the path, side by side with her little foot-prints !

"Who can she have had with her ? She has gone along here," I said.

Cecil made me no answer, but when I glanced at her face, I knew what she suspected, for her expression was oh ! so pained and ghastly !

“No—you’re mistaken! I exclaimed. “It is not that, it can’t be that.”

She spoke in a hard, forced voice:—

“I told you so long ago. Would to God, I had never listened to your assurances!”

Oh reader, do you know what I felt then, what I suffered as her words forced themselves home to my heart, convicting me, opening out to me the truth at last! I saw it all in a moment! How wofully I had been blinded, I might almost say how wilfully—how I had misled and injured my child!

The scene reeled before me; the white light dazzled my eyes; my heart beat against my breast till I could scarcely breathe, and before me on the path, coming out of the old summer-house, where years before her mother had had that terrible interview with Captain Rogerson, was Salome herself, and John Phillips with her. And as though to dispel all doubt he had taken her hand, and now drawing it onto his arm was holding it firmly and caressingly.

They had seen us and were coming to meet us. Salome's eyes were bent to the ground, but her young face was bright with happiness. John was looking at us with a smile that spoke unutterable things—love, joy, triumph, all in one.

I had been mistaken throughout! John Phillips had only and solely loved Salome Fielding! Now she had promised to be his wife, and Cecil's transient dream of happiness was at an end. Do you wonder that my heart rose up to Heaven and asked for God's help for my child; and God's forgiveness for myself?

"Go on, Mimi, speak to them, I can't. Don't let them suspect anything," whispered Cecil, hoarsely.

I held out my hand to John Phillips, and he took it, and pressed it warmly. He only said:—"You know all, Miss White—give us a 'God bless you;'" and Salome put her face up to be kissed, and looked ready to cry with happiness.

John Phillips glanced eagerly at Cecil. She extended her hand, and he took it, reverently, affectionately pressing it to his lips. I saw her poor, pale face flush; I saw her rapid withdrawal of her hand, the convulsive working of her lips. She did not say a word, neither did he.

A strange shadow and restraint seemed to have fallen over the party. We walked back to the house almost in silence, and immediately on gaining it, Cecil hurried upstairs. I was going to follow her when Salome stopped me.

"Oh, don't go away, Mimi, John wishes to speak to you, and I am going to take off my hat. But you won't be very long over your talk, will you? I shall want to come back."

She was looking very pretty and coaxing, but I took no further notice of her than to do her bidding, to follow John Phillips through the open door into the library.

For a second we sat in silence, he was evidently puzzled how to begin, perhaps

especially perplexed by my constrained manner.

“I fear you think that I am very presuming, Miss White,” he said at length, “very presuming in attempting to gain such a precious prize as this. I know I am not worthy of her, and I do assure you, that for a long time I held aloof and battled with myself from the very feeling of my unworthiness. But, Miss White, I fancied, I flattered myself that you looked kindly on my suit; God bless you for it! and by a happy chance I discovered that I was not an object of indifference to the dear girl herself, and I thought I might speak to her at any rate. I am not rich, or anything of the kind; but I have a little competence of my own, thanks to the liberality of my uncle, and I have a pretty good living promised me for by and bye, and Salome is good enough to say that she is not afraid of giving up a few extra luxuries for a year or two—”

He paused, evidently hoping that I should come to his rescue. But I was silent; I was

wondering how it was that he did not know of Salome's own little fortune. I was half astonished to learn that he had anything of his own.

"And, Miss White," he went on, "I'm sure I'll do my best to make her life a happy one; she shan't have a wish unfulfilled if I can help it."

His tones were so earnest, so pleading that instinctively my heart melted. I knew all the blame was mine, and mine only, and I was forced to take it to myself; I had no right to mar the happiness of these two, even though my heart was torn with sympathy for poor Cecil. So I answered him cordially, talked over his affairs, and said kind words about Salome. He was so happy, poor fellow, tears actually stood in his eyes when he spoke of the future. He seemed to have gained a great goal, which he could scarcely estimate highly enough.

He told me his love story, all about his meeting with Salome in the south, and how

she had gained on his affections, how he had fought against the weakness, because his position seemed to hold out so little prospect for marriage; how when, by his uncle's death, he had gained that small competence, and a living was promised him by a college friend, his thoughts had reverted to Salome, and he had ventured to indulge hope. He had met us at Lady Armitage's, and been more and more entranced; but then came the shadow over him, the jealousy which Salome's thoughtless conduct must too naturally have awakened—fear of Lord John—almost despair. I had little known how I had set the poor fellow's mind at ease when that day in York I told him of Salome's confession.

She had been nearly as much in love with John Phillips, as John Phillips was with her. But she had gone a very bad way to work when she sought to influence him by his fears, and arouse his jealousy by pretending to lend a fond ear to Lord John's civil speeches—that was very wrong of her! She had, however,

been made humble and penitent by Lord John's unlooked-for declaration, and the following night, at the ball, when John Phillips showed her kindness and attention, she was softened into betraying her real feelings, or at least into allowing them to be suspected. So in a moment of excitement, John said something about himself which could not be misunderstood, and Salome replied to it with a sympathy that was also unmistakable; the two settled the matter in their own way; and naturally enough the next morning John Phillips looked very happy, and told me that he wanted to speak to me particularly, and on the earliest opportunity. That was all; it was a simple and natural enough story, which only my foolish blindness could have bungled over.

Throughout our conference John was the chief speaker. His happiness easily supplied him with words, and so long as my answers were kind, he recked little that they were short. He talked eagerly; he had so much

to tell, so many plans about which to consult me; and I sat opposite to him, apparently listening; if he had not been so engrossed in his subject, perhaps he might have been struck by the occasional pain and perplexity which my countenance expressed—for I was thinking of Cecil—poor Cecil!

At length John Phillips mentioned her name, in a hesitating voice, and with most unmistakable confusion.

“Oh, Miss White,” he said, “I feel as though we had been very thoughtless, in thus bringing forward our happiness before poor Cecil. I am afraid she will think us so very heartless. I mean all this must be so painful to her, from circumstances.”

All the blood rushed to my face, dyeing brow, cheeks, and neck crimson — think of his alluding to Cecil in this way!

“What do you mean, I don’t quite understand?” I stammered, with a desperate attempt to screen my child.

John looked nearly as confused as myself.

"I beg pardon for my allusion," he said. "Of course you would rather not speak of it, and it is all past and must have caused you so much sorrow at the time, no wonder you shrink from the subject. Poor George Vivian, his was indeed an untimely fate!"

"George Vivian!" I gasped faintly.

"Yes, don't think me inquisitive, it was poor George himself who only a day or two before his death wrote me word of Cecil's engagement to him — such a bright, happy letter, overflowing with joy and gratitude. And you know the announcement did not surprise me, for even when I was at Redcar I suspected how matters stood. The very next intelligence I received was of the poor fellow's death, you may be sure how I grieved over it, especially for Cecil's sake."

I sat literally dumb with astonishment as John made me this explanation. What endless mistakes we had fallen into from beginning to end. Even at Redcar then John Phillips had been George Vivian's confidant!

A light stole across me—I remembered that speech of poor George's on the sandhills, about someone having led him to think that his love was not unreciprocated. This someone then had been John Phillips, and John Phillips to this very hour evidently believed that Cecil had been attached to his dead friend. Doubtless in this belief he was furnished with ample explanation for her present conduct; and when a sudden impulse suggested to me to correct his statement my love for Cecil drew me back; no, I must give no explanations, she and I could not bear now that John should know the truth! Better for him and her that he should think she had cared for poor George Vivian, and cared for him only. Without telling the whole story of Captain Vivian's duplicity, of Mr. Claridge's evil-doings, of Cecil's own weakness, I could not reveal the true past to John Phillips—and that I could not do, oh no, no!

“Well, have you finished your conclave? Do make haste and let me in,” cried Salome

from the hall, and I opened the door and admitted her. She wanted a kiss from me, and I gave it her—how could I refuse the child?

“You are not very angry with me now for saying ‘no’ to Lord John Rayleigh, are you, Mimi?” asked the child. “John’s forgiven me. I tell him that it was more than half his fault that I behaved so naughtily. He would not take nearly enough notice of me sometimes at Grinton, and then I grew quite horrid and jealous and tried to pique him—and I know I did!” with a wicked little air of triumph.

“Oh, hush, Salome, that’s not the way to speak.”

“Listen to her, John, that’s just how she scolds me sometimes, and far worse too when we are alone. But I’m going to be good now and never flirt any more,” with a *sotto voce* reservation, “at least not till you vex me next time!”

John laughed and said, “But I shan’t have any reason to be frightened now.”

"Oh yes, you will, for I may change my mind."

"Then the only thing will be to put the means of doing so out of your power as soon as possible."

Salome blushed, and I said I must go and get ready for luncheon.

I was scarcely a moment in my own room. I went as quickly as I could to Cecil's door and knocked.

She did not answer, and I repeated my summons. Then the bolt was slipped, and a very low voice said, "Come in."

There was little change in Cecil's room from what it used to be in the days of her childhood. The quaint old pictures were still in the panels, her mother's portrait hung opposite to the little bed, and the washing-stand was placed below it. I think Cecil must have thrown herself on to the bed when she rushed upstairs, for the coverlet was crushed and disordered, and when I opened the door, Cecil

with her shawl still on and her hair all rough and untidy, met me on the threshold.

When she saw it was only I, she made room for me to pass and turned away her head. I gently closed the door and put my hand on her arm.

"My poor, poor child!" I exclaimed, "can you ever forgive me?"

She looked round at me with a strange, piteous expression in her eyes, but made me no reply. I felt my flesh creeping as I watched her; she was so perfectly still and blanched, and her face was so hopeless, it was like that of a dumb animal in the last extremity.

I kissed her passive cheeks; she returned me no salute, scarcely seemed conscious of my presence. I spoke to her again and again, but I could win no answer; my tears fell down like rain, her eyes were tearless. At last I persuaded her to sit down on the chair close to the door.

I was but a step from her when I raised my eyes and caught the expression of the face on the canvass above. Mother and daughter! was there ever such a likeness? As Cecil bent slightly forward on her chair, her face pale as death, her beautiful, brown eyes, melting in their expression of pain, tenderness, yearning, turned towards me, I beheld the counterpart of the broken-hearted woman pictured on the panel above; and I shivered as though some dark angel had laid his fingers on me.

Oh! woman, woman, woman, to what are you not made heir, when you come into this world with your loving, faithful heart, yet with that fearful lack of strength which renders you so easy a prey to sorrow and temptation? Oh! woman, there is a God who made you and whose strength can make perfect your insufficiency, go to Him and lean on Him, He is eternal love, faithful and true, and in Him alone is your help! Even now, may be at the sepulchre of your hopes, you are

meeting Him, and He is appealing to you by name, will you not turn and worship, calling Him as Mary did: "Rabbi—Master!"

"Cecil," I implored, kneeling before her and taking her hands in mine, "will you not forgive me? All the blame was mine—speak Cecil, your silence is breaking my heart, say you forgive me!"

Her mouth relaxed: the white lips quivered nervously. "Forgive you, Mimi, I have nothing to forgive. You are not to blame, no one is, it is the curse on the race!"

"No! no!" I exclaimed, starting up in horror, "not that, that is only a legend, and has nothing to do with it!"

Her only answer was to quote a text: "The candle of the wicked shall be put out."*

Do you know how the Word of God sounds when quoted thus, in an hour of sore trial, when human words, being insufficient for comfort, have still less influence for argument? Do you know what it is to realize a

* Pro. xxiv—20.

Divine threatening? You are happy indeed if you do not!

Now, after so many generations had gone by, Rupert de Claridge's last descendant was realizing the full meaning of the curse which his sacrilegious audacity had brought on his own head, and on the heads of those who might come after him. She, so many years later, firmly believed that she was having her candle put out because she was of the seed of the wicked. Am I speaking strongly? Reader, do you remember when, as a little child, you learnt that God visits "the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate Him and sheweth mercy unto thousands in them that love Him and keep His commandments?" That is a divine truth, however you seek to interpret it, and if you doubt its reality, look around you and see what life and experience, and your fellowmen testify about the matter. Attesting words and facts meet us on every-side.

Loudly through the old Abbots sounded the gong for luncheon, and its echo startled Cecil from her reverie.

"Are you coming down?" I asked, anxiously; "or if you prefer doing so, dear, you might have your luncheon up here; you have always the excuse of your headache."

She answered me very hurriedly: "Oh! no, on no account. I am not ill, don't attract attention to me. My only request to you, Mimi, is, that you'll stave off suspicion from me—you will, won't you? You'll not let them know anything? I can bear all but that?"

I promised her faithfully to do my best; and we went down together, meeting John Phillips and Salome in the hall; and probably the sight of Cecil's bleached face, or it may be some representation from her lover, restrained the child's lively speech and nonsense, for Salome sat demurely through the meal, showing her sister all sorts of little, silent, loving attentions, but never bringing

her own happiness too forward. As to Cecil, she was perfectly still, perfectly self-possessed, though cold and restrained. She never spoke of her own accord, and when she answered our accidental remarks, it was merely in monosyllables.

She startled me at the conclusion of luncheon by desiring the servant to order the close carriage to be at the door in half an hour's time as she wished to drive into Kirkby Holme.

"Into Kirkby Holme!" and Salome looked up in surprise, "but Cecil, dear, you'll be so late, you can't start much before three o'clock, and it is an eight miles drive?"

"I have business," was Cecil's brief reply, "you need not wait dinner for me."

She rose to leave the room and I followed her closely.

"You are not really meaning to go to Kirkby Holme this afternoon, dear; you'll wait till to-morrow?"

Again came the answer; "I can't, I am going on business."

"But surely your business can be deferred for a day?"

"No, I thank you, it is imperative," and she moved away."

"But Cecil, stop one minute, Salome will naturally wish to remain at home this afternoon. And I could scarcely leave her at home, under the circumstances; it might seem strange and people might call, you know."

"But why need you leave her?"

"You wouldn't like to go that long drive all alone?"

"I don't mind it in the least, pray don't think of me," and Cecil trod statelily up the staircase.

I stood irresolutely in the hall. I was in terrible perplexity. Between my great regard for the proprieties of life and my affection for Cecil, I scarcely knew how to act. Surely, it would not be quite the thing to leave a

young girl such as Salome was, alone for hours with a youth like John Phillips, especially now they were engaged—people might talk about it. But on the other hand when Cecil was so tried and troubled, how could I desert her, how could I allow her to take that long dreary drive all by herself, with only her miserable thoughts to bear her company?

My love finally overcame the lesser obstacle. I put aside my fear about the arrangement not being quite *proper*, and turning into the drawing-room apologised to the young people for leaving them; at the same time asked John Phillips if we should find him here on our return—would the Egertons expect him to be so long absent?

I believe I half hoped that he would say that he ought to go back to Torrehill immediately.

But no such thing, he had told the Egertons that he should probably be absent till late; his being so was natural enough when

he had the excuse of revisiting his old home and seeing so many former friends. If he were back at Torrehill in time for dinner, he should do famously, he said.

Well then, at this rate he would be gone before we got home, and I wished him "Good-bye" and gave him the permission he demanded to walk over again and see us to-morrow, either in time for, or after service.

"And by the way, if Mrs. Egerton's suspicions should be aroused and she should ask questions, what am I to say, Miss White? I shouldn't wonder if she were puzzled by my coming over here a second time?"

"You had better tell her the truth. There is no reason why the engagement should be kept secret."

John seemed to hesitate, but Salome said in that funny quaint fashion of hers:—

"Don't you think Mimi, Mrs. Egerton will be relieved by knowing that John is not making up to Cecil, and perhaps too she won't be sorry to feel that I am done for?"

I winced at her unwitting allusion, and went away.

The carriage was at the door, and Cecil was on the point of stepping into it, when I, cloaked and bonnetted, made my appearance in the hall.

Evidently my intention of accompanying her started Cecil. She met me with an enquiring, investigating glance, and said that she was surprised—she thought I had been otherwise engaged—she hoped I was not coming on her account.

I equivocated very culpably ; I said that I wanted to execute a commission, and at the moment I extemporised a desire for some mull muslin which I had seen at the draper's the last time we were in the town.

“Cliff has plenty in the store closet, if you ask her for it; you need not take this long drive expressly for the purchase of muslin, when there is all you need in the house;” and Cecil stood at the carriage door as though

she would bar my entrance, and her eyes were watching me very strangely and suspiciously.

"Thank you, dear," I said, "but I want *mull* muslin, nothing else will do so well; it is to make habit shirts. Will you get in first, the horses are growing impatient?"

She gave way with a sigh, evidently finding that it was useless to oppose me, and I seated myself at her side. Down the smooth, snow-covered drive we went, under the leafless lime trees, through the gate, and so out upon the high road.

We had a very silent drive. I could not get Cecil to enter into any conversation with me. She leant back in the corner, and after a while took out her pocket book and on a blank leaf began to make memoranda. I watched her and wondered—what could she be doing? and what could be the imperative business which was taking her so suddenly into Kirkby Holme?"

When we came in sight of the town she

looked up at me abruptly, and asked "Where do you want to go, Mimi? I'll put you down on my way and after you have executed your commissions I will call for you at Mrs. Evans's, if you will wait for me there."

"Oh, I shan't be a minute in getting my muslin," I said; "if you will let me do so, I had rather come with you."

"No, that can't be," she answered shortly; "my business is with my lawyer, and besides I should not like to detain you so long." And she pulled the check string.

"But I don't mind waiting for you in Mr. Hill's ante-room," I ventured to begin.

She took no notice of my suggestion, but gave the footman instructions to drive direct to the linen drapers. There was no alternative for me but to get out when the carriage stopped in the narrow street, and leave Cecil to her own devices.

"Then I shall call for you at Mrs. Evans's in about half-an-hour's time," she said, as she drew up the glass. The next minute the

coachman had touched his horses, and the carriage passed rapidly down the street. When I had purchased my muslin, and on my way to Mrs. Evans's, passed through the Market place, the carriage was standing at the door of Mr. Hill's office.

Mr. Hill was the solicitor whom Cecil employed to execute any small, legal business for her. He had been established in Kirkby Holme for many years, and was universally respected as an upright and honourable man. Not a very polished gentleman, as Salome used to say mischievously, when he came over to the Abbots on business, and joining us at luncheon, would pass broad jokes in a provincial dialect. Years ago he had been associated with Mr. Scott in the making of Mrs. Claridge's will, and ever since he had proved a zealous and honest guardian of her daughter's interests. I honoured him as everyone must honour a good man, and Cecil always spoke of him with cordial liking. But I wondered what could be her business with him now.

I went and paid my visit to Mrs. Evans, and a very long visit it proved. An hour passed. I had received endless kisses from little Edith, looked over all the children's copy books, shown Ruth some new embroidery stitches, listened to various plaintive histories from poor Mrs. Evans herself, and still Cecil did not come. One of the children stationed herself at the window to watch for the carriage, and I grew momentarily more uneasy and unquiet.

At last five o'clock struck. It was growing quite dark out of doors and the street lamps were being lighted. I could bear the suspense no longer, and I told Mrs. Evans that I would walk as far as Mr. Hill's, and join Cecil there.

Mrs. Evans would have prevented me, and indeed she was sadly disappointed to miss seeing Cecil; but I felt that we were already late enough in setting out for home, and that had Cecil been detained by business, she would be glad to find me ready to start so

soon as she was at liberty. I went briskly down the narrow street, drawing my wraps tightly round me because of the cold.

The pavement had been swept, and high heaps of dirty snow skirted it, dimly visible in the light of the lamps. The gas-illuminated shops shone on either side of me as I entered the market place; there were a good many people coming and going, a postman successively rapping at each door to my left hand, a boy with a large basket swung before him, who was selling the evening papers, and seeking to attract attention and curiosity to his wares by the alarming notices of their contents, which he sung out in a shrill, high-pitched voice.

“Evening Star—dreadful fire at Newark, eighteen lives lost—appalling murder at Caversham, detection of the murderer—victory in Italy—Garibaldi—Buy the Evening Star which tells of the dreadful fire—” and again the same history was repeated, over and over again till the lad’s voice grew faint in the

distance and the corner of the street hid him from my view.

I was walking hastily along. The length of this pavement, a brief crossing, and I should be at Mr. Hill's door. Just then the bright coloured bottles, red, green, blue, in the chemist's window attracted my attention. My eye travelled from the illuminated glass to the entrance of the shop, and, to my surprise, rested on the figure of Cecil Claridge, who was standing beside the counter.

She was speaking to the shopman, and her back was turned to me. The man had just given into her hand a very small, labelled packet, and now was handing her an open book and a pen.

"I am sorry to trouble you, Ma'am," he said ; "but we are not allowed to sell it without the purchaser signs his name in here. Ye see, Ma'am, all sorts of people might buy it, and for all sorts of purposes, if there was not some hold kept on them."

"Ah yes, of course. That will be right,

won't it?" I heard Cecil say in a low voice; and when she pushed away the book I saw that on the page there was a clear, flowing *Cecil Clerveaux Claridge*, whereof the wet ink glittered in the light from the gas jet.

"You've got the parcel, I think, thank you Ma'am, I am sure it will answer. Half the quantity will be amply sufficient; you must have it mixed in the beast's food, and when it takes it, it will probably die without a groan. I put an old favourite of my own out of the way in the same manner only a week or two ago. It is much kinder to do it than to let the poor beasts live on in miserable pain and disease. Will you sit down, Ma'am, till your carriage comes?"

"Thank you, no; it is to meet me at Mrs. Evans's. Good afternoon;" and Cecil, turning to leave the shop, met me face to face.

She started; looked ready to sink in the ground, with a great effort rallied her strength and asked me if I had missed the carriage.

I was shivering with terror; and I followed her out of the shop, too frightened to recover speech. Again, and this time rather sharply, she repeated her inquiry about the carriage. She evidently noted my alarm and gained courage from the discovery. She adopted a haughty, commanding air, and left no opening for me to question her. She said that finding her stay at Mr. Hill's would be protracted, she had the carriage put up at the Inn, and just now on leaving the office had given orders that it should be driven direct to Mrs. Evans's where she would join it.

Even as she spoke there was a rumbling of wheels and the carriage lamps gleamed in the distance. At Cecil's request the shopman hailed the coachman, and the horses drew up close to the pavement. But just as she was advancing to enter the carriage, Cecil's foot slipped on the icy flags, and she fell. She was on her feet again in a minute; but her muff had slipped from her hand and its contents were scattered in all directions.

As the servant stooped to collect them, I bent down and gained possession of that tiny white parcel, so like a powder, which lay at my feet. Before I knew what I was doing I had read the large printed letters on the label which secured it.

"POISON!"

Reader, how do you think I felt ?

"That's mine, I believe," Cecil said, in a very calm, albeit a constrained voice.

The footman and the shopman stood close to my side, and I gave it up to her in silence and moved forward to my seat in the carriage.

The door was closed, the glasses up, we were driving over the cobblestones. Cecil had shrunk back into her corner, and in the obscurity I could not distinguish her face. Then I bent forward, impelled by that terrible misgiving, and seized both of her hands.

"Cecil, Cecil, what have you been doing? Oh, Cecil, have I not tended and loved you since you were a child? will you not let me be your friend now?"

I spoke in a voice of agony.

She strove to release her hands from my grasp, and oh, how icy and forbidding was her tone !

"I cannot think what you mean, pray explain yourself."

Anger, excitement, misery, I could have answered, but how reply to that chilling, repellent voice, which seemed to say that I was nothing to her, that her concerns were to me as naught.

"Cecil," I implored, "tell me, oh ! do tell me, why did you come into Kirkby?"

"Is that all you want to know ? really, I think that at my age I might be entrusted with the management of my own affairs. I came in to see Mr. Hill, and to ask his assistance in a matter of some perplexity. I am sorry I cannot tell you more at present ; but probably your curiosity will be gratified in a little while."

Each of those icy, cutting words stung me to the quick. Till now I had been Cecil's

friend and mother! now she forgot all the past, and cast me off. Was her conduct the punishment of my wicked plotting and planning in a matter which I had better have left to the disposal of a wise Providence?

"Oh, Cecil, Cecil!" I cried, "I may unwittingly have done you wrong, but I do not deserve that you should speak thus to me, I do not, indeed."

She shrank further back in her corner, and I heard her breathing hard. Again I groped about to find her hand.

"Well, what is it?" she asked under her breath.

And I fancied she made a great effort to restrain a sob.

"What do you want with that stuff you were buying at the chemists?"

"What stuff?"

There had been a moment's pause, and now her voice had regained its old hardness.

"*The Poison.*"

My whisper was literally awestruck.

Again that ominous silence. Then Cecil answered me.

"Cliff wished some to be obtained, so that if the old dog in the stables continues ailing, it may be put out of its misery."

'*Put out of its misery,*' the words sounded like the hiss of a serpent.

"I wonder why Cliff did not desire one of the servants to get it. It is not a pleasant office to buy poison, even for a dog."

What an effort I made to say this!

"The commission is not one I should care to entrust to a servant," she answered; "and as to the cruelty of putting the beast out of the way, I do not see it. It is better to suffer death than to live suffering."

Had her words a double significance? In my agony I fancied they might have; but I passed them over, only saying in a clear, slow voice—

"Perhaps you are right in the case of a dog, which has no soul."

Surely she shivered! I could feel the cushions vibrating.

She did not speak again, neither did I. After a while, I fancied she was asleep, and I sat very still that I might not disturb her. My hands were folded together, and though no knee was bent, I was praying to Almighty God, pleading, imploring, praying, as we only pray when our souls are in that adversity from which God alone can bring them.

On, on through the darkness we sped, on, on in our misery, passing shining lights in cottage windows, and gaunt, dark hedgerows; past the ungainly tower of the Burton church, and so home.

When we alighted from the carriage an eager voice greeted us. Salome stood on the threshold in a soft evening dress, looking wondrously pretty and animated, and John Phillips at her side was endeavouring to persuade her to move out of the draught.

“You’ve come home at last, but how late

you are!" exclaimed the child. "I began to get quite uneasy—do you know it is past seven o'clock? I wanted to send and look after you, fearing lest some accident had happened, but John was sure all would be right. Come in and warm yourself, and you'll have dinner at once, won't you? Cecil, dear, have you a headache, you look so pale?"

"So we find you here after all, John?" I observed when he was helping me to take off my cloak.

"Yes, I have been on the point of starting many times, but Salome was so fidgety about you not getting home that I did not like to leave her, but I must set off now."

"Oh no, not now, do stay for dinner," implored Salome. "If you will you shall have the dog-cart to take you home, shan't he, Cecil? There, don't look so shocked, Cecil always lets me have anything I like. You know it doesn't matter about your being late at Torrehill now we have sent off the note."

"What note!" I asked.

"Why, John thought they would wait dinner for him if he didn't appear, so he wrote a note of excuse, and I sent the garden boy over to Torrehill with it." Salome spoke as though she had done the most natural thing in the world. I felt a little ashamed of her officiousness, but at any rate she got her own way.

Cecil had gone up to her room, and I followed her example. When I had taken off my bonnet I knocked at her door to inquire if she were ready, and lo and behold! she had stolen a march on me and was already downstairs. I found her sitting on the drawing-room sofa, with her hand to her head, and by the excuse of a bad headache avoiding conversation with her companions.

Dinner was a silent meal, despite many efforts on Salome's part to be merry. Even she at last felt that something was amiss and relapsed into silence, only glancing up every

now and then to smile at John and me ; she would have smiled at Cecil too had her step-sister given her the least encouragement.

Soon after dinner John took his departure, when Salome resorting for consolation to the third volume of a novel, and Cecil lying down on the sofa, I stole upstairs and rang my bell to summon Cliff.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PACKET OF POISON.

"I have *loved*," she said,
 (Words bowing her head
 As the wind bows the wet acacia-trees !)
 "I saw God sitting above me,—but I...I sat among men,
 And I have loved these."

* * * *

"I have loved," she said—
 "Man is weak, God is dread ;
 Yet the weakest man dies with his spirit at ease,
 Having poured such love-oil on the Saviour's feet,
 As I lavished for these."

* * *

But she wept and said,
 "God over my head,
 Will sweep in the wrath of His judgment seas,
 If He deal with me sinning, but only the same
 And not gentler than these !"

E. B. BROWNING.

CLIFF came to my room, candlestick in hand,
 and with her old fashioned make of gown, red

ribboned cap and grizzled hair, vividly recalling to my memory that long ago evening, when, on my first arrival she had shewn me up here and talked to me about Cecil. Who would think that that was only eleven years ago !

The old woman evidently expected that I had something important to speak to her about. She shut the door carefully behind her, and accepted the chair which I had drawn close to the fire. In these days Cliff was growing both old and rheumatic.

I began by letting her into the secret of Miss Fielding's engagement to Mr. Phillips, which, as she knew nothing of Cecil's attachment to him, afforded her unmixed satisfaction. She would have gone on talking of the bride and bridegroom to be, for hours, if I had not stopped her. I did not wish to excite suspicion or apprehension on her part, but I was very anxious to gain one piece of intelligence. I asked after the old dog in the stables.

"Ah, poor beast," she said, "he's done for. He was so bad this afternoon that I thought it was better for Robinson to shoot him."

"Then," I said, "Miss Claridge was too late in getting the poison."

"Oh, did she get some when she was in Kirkby?" Mrs. Cliff responded. "I did not know she was meaning to do that. To be sure I did tell her this morning that I thought the poor critur must be put out of the way, and I wished we had some stuff at hand."

How relieved was my heart! I drew a long, long breath, and pushed the hair off my temples.

"Yes, she got it," I said, with a put-on air of nonchalance; "but it was of no consequence, and perhaps it is as well to have something of the kind in the house. However, it is not wise to leave these things about, and I think, Mrs. Cliff, it would be a good thing for you to ask her for it and lock it up in the store closet."

"Aye, sure-lie—(this was a favorite expression with Mrs. Cliff)—them poisons is nasty things, and the girls—(by whom she meant the servants)—the girls is so inquisitive, and will be looking at and tasting everything that's laid about. I had better put it away,—where is it?"

"Miss Claridge has it somewhere in her room," I answered, "you can ask her for it when you go to her at bed time."

"To be sure, ma'am. And now then, what were you saying about Miss Salome's fortune?"

I stayed to talk but a few minutes longer, being anxious to return to the drawing-room. Cecil was still on the sofa and seemed to be asleep. Salome, when I opened the door, held up her finger to enjoin silence.

"Poor Cecil, she has got one of her old bad headaches," whispered the child.

But I was by no means so sure that Cecil's pallor was produced by headache, or that she was even now sleeping. Over and over again I saw her nostrils working convulsively, just

as they used to do, when in her old childish days she struggled to keep down a great storm of passion. When the clock struck ten she roused, and said she would go up to bed. She asked me if I would take her place for that once and read prayers to the servants.

Salome would have made a great fuss about accompanying her sister upstairs, helping her to undress, and suggesting remedies for her headache; but Cecil coldly, almost ungraciously, repulsed her, and with a short greeting to both of us took her departure alone.

Salome was hurt, mortified, unhappy, not only at Cecil's present conduct, but because all the day long she had never given her one word of sisterly affection or congratulation. She had made a good many allowances for her on the score of that old story about George Vivian, which John had related to her; but she could not quite forget the fact, that her sister entirely overlooked her present happiness in the contemplation of her own

past trials. Salome was very near crying when she knelt at my side and poured out to me these little troubles.

When we went into the dining-room, I discovered from Cliff's empty place that Cecil must at any rate have accepted the services of her old nurse. I read the prayers; I prayed them with all my heart. I had so much for which I needed to ask God's forgiveness—such evil suspicions, such lack of faith, such failure in love and charity; and besides I wanted our Father's tenderness and comfort to bless my darling. It is in our adversity that we think upon God, when our soul refuses comfort, that we cry unto Him—and He hears us!

I kissed Salome and sent her up to bed. On gaining my own room, I met Cliff, who was just leaving that of Cecil. As we stood together in the passage, I whispered to her: "Have you asked Miss Claridge for that dog powder?"

"Oh! dear me, no more I have! I'd

better get it while I remember it," and she turned back and tapped at the door.

"Who is that?" enquired Cecil's voice.

"It's me Ma'am, it's Cliff, I just want to speak to you."

"You can't come in now, I'm busy."

Cliff came back to me. "It doesn't matter for to-night, after all. I must try and think-on to get it to-morrow morning. Good-night, Miss White."

My first impulse was to stop her, and implore her to gain possession of the parcel; my second to draw back with self-reproach. Of what was I suspecting my darling, whom I had never known to be other than God-fearing and well-principled? What right had I to think evil? Had not Cliff told me that she had herself suggested the purchase of the poison?

I went into my room and closed the door. By the time I had undressed there was not a sound in Cecil's room, and supposing that she must be in bed, I went to her door, intending

to wish her good-night, and ask if there was anything I could get or do for her.

But the door was still locked and Cecil spoke to me through the key-hole, saying, she was better and wanted nothing—good-night.

I came back, with an uneasy feeling at my heart, for which I could not account; and instead of getting into bed, I knelt down again and prayed earnestly.

There was silence throughout the house. I sat on a low chair by my fire, reading my Bible, I could not rest, and sleep was out of the question; I was watching, though I scarcely knew for what.

Eleven o'clock.

Twelve o'clock. In spite of myself, I was growing sleepy—but hark, what was that? Some one was moving in the next room!

I listened with straining nerves. Was Cecil ill, or what was she doing at this time of night?

Another sound, what should I do? My eye fell on the black oak wardrobe opposite,

and a thought suggested itself to me—might I not look through the holes in the panel and without disturbing her by going to her room, discover what she was doing—or if she was likely to want anything.

No sooner thought of than done. I noiselessly entered the cupboard, touched the spring, stood in the secret chamber.

There was a louder sound, like the vibration of china close to me, and I slid back the panel and applied my eyes to the holes.

What a sight met my gaze!

Directly below me was the washing-stand, and by it stood Cecil Claridge, a candle flinging a lurid light over her face, which was white, drawn, agonized, scarcely like the face of a human being. Her lips were bloodless and tightly set, the eyes wild and restless, and her hand shook so when she threw the contents of a small paper parcel into the glass which she was holding, that a shower of white powder dispersed itself over the table.

There was no mistaking the paper which

she threw aside. There was the printed label on it even now, and I could almost read the word which those black letters composed, Poison!

Poison—was that harmless-looking white powder—scarcely a teaspoonful in quantity, which covered the bottom of the glass, poison? Could it be possible?

Cecil held the tumbler close to her, put it before the light, smelled its contents—hesitated—seemed to be listening—the scattered powder on the washing-stand caught her eye and she brushed it into a little heap with the side of her comely, white hand, and putting the glass close to the marble slab, flung the few grains amongst the rest.

I was paralyzed with horror. I could not move or cry. But some strange fascination kept my eyes fixed on the unhappy girl.

She had momentarily put down the glass and moved to the writing table by the window. She had probably been busy with the

papers scattered about on it ever since Cliff left her. There were several letters, sealed and directed, laid out on the desk, and a heap of torn papers and parchments was on the floor. She seemed to have been arranging her affairs.

The bed was untouched, the snow-white sheet was folded smoothly over the coverlet. The fire was just out, only one tiny red spark shone through the lowest bar of the grate, and a chair was drawn close to the fender as though Cecil had recently been warming herself.

She turned round, and again came close to the washing-stand. On her still, white face could be read the cold despair which enchained her heart, but also there was the fixed, iron resolution of—oh, what shall I say?

She took the glass in her hand, she poured into it a little water from the decanter—shook it—the powder sank to the bottom of the glass, and would not mix, and she opened one

of the china boxes, selected a tooth-brush and stirred the liquid round and round with its ivory handle.

Now it was mixed. I thought I screamed and called on her to stop—but no, no sound came from my frozen lips—when I tried to dart from the cupboard and gain her room, my limbs refused to move, positive terror and agony had paralyzed me!

She laid the wet tooth-brush on the slab, raised the glass—it was touching her lips when some impulse made her give one last look round, pause for the indulgence of one memory before life and earthly things passed for ever from her grasp—before the Hell in her heart claimed her for Hell's eternity!

The girl looked round on the old nursery of her childhood, on the wide window-seat where she used to spread that torn copy of the Apocrypha and spell out the history of Tobit's son—where she used to fondle her poor Tobias—on the little bed in which she used to dream happy dreams long ago—on the

pictures which had suggested to her young imagination bright stories of days gone by—above all on the portrait of her mother whose trial had even been darker and heavier than her own—Cecil was looking straight into my eyes—into the eyes of one who loved her with almost a mother's love!

But she recognised nothing there, her gaze travelled to the dressing table beyond, where amongst a medley of shining toilette bottles and pretty china trifles, lay the old Bible with her mother's name. The Bible that for years past she had been wont to study morning and night!

I saw her recognise it—I saw her start—I saw her change colour—hesitate. She seemed to be awakening from some dark dream; she put her hand up to her brow—pushed her thick hair out of her eyes. There—still holding the glass, she walked forward and stretched out her hand—she was touching the Bible.

Now with a low, bitter cry, she dashed

the glass on the floor, and sank down by the bedside. I heard her give way to a great storm of grief and penitence ; I saw her breast heaving with convulsive sobs, the flood of relieving tears which bathed her drawn face—and once more my heart beat, the revulsion of feeling was almost stifling, and I cast myself down on my knees and thanked God. Not in words only, but with all the outpouring of a grateful heart—was not my child saved through His mercy ?

How long I knelt there I cannot say. I took no count of time. I had so much to tell to that Divine listener, so much to confide to our merciful Redeemer.

I was kneeling in the darkness, but there was no darkness in my heart. Just over my head on the woodwork shone two stars of silvery light, the reflection from the holes in the panel which I had not yet re-covered. I looked up and saw them once, and I almost smiled ; I was thinking of the stars out of doors, high up in the clear, frosty sky, of the

angels, who even now might be joying over the sinner who had repented !

I got up, and once more looked into Cecil's chamber. She was still kneeling, and the disjointed sentences of a prayer fell on my ears ; I heard one petition quite distinctly.

"God be merciful to me a sinner !"

The candle, burnt low in its socket, still stood on the washing stand ; the fragments of the broken glass were scattered upon the floor, and beside them were a line of moisture, sopping into the carpet. The poison was done away with at any rate, and I noiselessly closed the panel and stepped back into my room.

Again I knelt down and prayed—oh, what cause had I to bless God !

I never for a moment thought of going to Cecil's room and disturbing her now—no, I was quite at peace about her—was she not safe with her God, and that Good Angel, who in her hour of temptation had stayed her hand ?

I tried to reflect calmly on all that had occurred, and when I did so I felt very thank-

ful that Cecil was unconscious of my acquaintance with her secret—a secret which I rightly guessed, would weigh long and heavily on her conscience. There are some matters in which we can brook no interference ; there are some hidden sores of the mind which not even the tenderest love may handle—which only God's mercy can bind up ; some secrets lie between ourselves and our Judge, Who alone can read our penitence and grant us true forgiveness.

Now Cecil had an awful secret, as she believed, known only to herself and her God ; and it would be best for her to bear its punishment in silence. I only prayed that God would bless the cross to her and distil penitence from the terrible remorse which she could not fail to suffer. Hitherto her religion had been rather a good habit with her, the religion of education, careful training, and a naturally reverent mind, than the vital Faith and Love to God which it ought to be. But I asked God that through trouble and a hum-

bled spirit He would make himself known to her at last.

And also I prayed for myself. I laid out my sins and short-comings, so many in number, at the foot of the cross, and implored forgiveness for them; for how much had I not cause to reproach myself—to condemn myself!

CHAPTER XV.

AN HUMBLE AND CONTRITE HEART.

"Do not weep so—Dear—heart warm!
 It was best as it befell!
 If I say he did me harm,
 I speak wild,—I am not well.
 All his words were kind and good—
He esteemed me! Only, blood
 Runs so faint in womanhood."

E. B. BROWNING.

"Repentance,
 A salve, a comfort, and a cordial;
 He that hath her, the keys of heaven hath;
 This is the grave, this is the post, the path."

DEATTON.

WHEN the first grey dawn came to the sky I
 fell asleep. I was awoke by Cliff's coming
 into my room in a state of no little excitement.
 She had been, as was her wont, to

call Miss Claridge, and had found her with a very bad headache and decidedly feverish. She asked me if it would not be wise to send for Dr. Holt.

I rose hurriedly and went into the adjoining room. Its appearance was much as usual ; Cecil had carefully cleared away every vestige of her last night's occupation before she got into bed. Her desk was closed, the torn papers filled the fender, and there was nothing to recall to me the dreadful scene I had so recently witnessed, save a darker hue over one pattern of the carpet and a white-handled toothbrush which lay on the wash-stand.

Cecil scarcely looked up when I went in, but when I stooped down to kiss her hot forehead, her eyes involuntarily filled with tears, and she turned away.

"Don't," she said, "I'm not fit—don't!" and her voice was full of self-reproach.

I took no notice of her observation, but lightly smoothed the pillow and asked her a

few questions about the suffering. Feeling that there might be need for medical advice I made a sign to Cliff, who was standing in the passage, and she hastily went downstairs to give the necessary orders. Then I closed the door and came back to the bedside, speaking to my darling with the softest, kindest words I could recall.

My tenderness seemed to affect her most painfully. She hid her flushed face and tearless eyes amongst the pillows and murmured,

“Oh, Mimi, don’t speak to me like that, I’m not fit, not worthy. You don’t know what a wretch I am. Oh, dear, my poor head!”

“Hush, dear,” I said soothingly; “lie still, don’t excite yourself by talking. We are none of us good and worthy, save as God Almighty makes us so. And even the best of us knows not what evil devices he might follow did his protector and guardian let go his hand. Our only safety is in trusting implicitly in God; in repenting so soon as we

go astray, and humbly accepting the crosses which are ordained as our punishment."

I was feeling how much more of mind than of body must be this poor child's suffering; how even though medical skill and tender nursing might alleviate the physical pain, nothing of human origin could lull the remorse of her mind, and I longed to take her to the Great Physician and ask for the comfort of His help again.

"Have you said your prayers yet, dear? Shall I read them to you?" and without, waiting I knelt down by her side and began the Confession. I went on to the Collect for Ash Wednesday and several others which treat of our short-comings and God's long-suffering; and she grew calmer and was lying quite quiet, with her eyes closed, when I concluded.

"May I come in?" whispered Salome at the door.

It was Salome's voice, and I glanced anxiously at Cecil.

"Oh yes," she answered with an effort, "I want to speak to her."

Salome crept up to the bed on tiptoe, and leant over the pillow to kiss her sister.

What a contrast were those two—one, so fresh, so young, so full of life and happiness—the other, who numbered but a few years more, with the careworn face of a woman; that pained anxious expression of countenance which only comes after intimate acquaintance with sorrow, mental strife, and heart troubles.

I sat down in the chair beside the fire-place, in the same spot from which I had long ago witnessed Salome's mother offer her earnest prayer that she might be enabled to do her duty by her husband's child. And now I watched the interview between my two charges—between the second Cecil and the second Salome.

Salome had quite forgotten her little annoyance of last night. She spoke caressingly to her sister, fondled and petted her; and I saw with overflowing eyes how Cecil at last drew

that fresh, smiling, young face towards her, and read every thought that was depicted there, finally closed her eyes with a sigh, so deep, so meaning,—a sigh that seemed to me to contrast Salome's past, present, and future, and more than all her conscience, with her own !

“ You had rather be quite quiet, I dare say, dear, if your head is so bad,” Salome was saying.

“ No, don't go yet. I want to speak to you,” Cecil exclaimed anxiously; “ I want to give you a sister's good wishes and blessing.”

“ Dear, dear Cecil !” and Salome flung her arms round her neck.

“ I am sure you deserve happiness, darling,” Cecil began again. “ And I hope and believe you will find such in the new life that is awaiting you. He—(she could not say his name)—he is very good and worthy of you, and you are well fitted to be a comfort to him. God bless both of you !”

Yes, my child, erring and misled as she might sometimes be by her blind idolatry

and her passionate nature, was a noble woman after all !—better than that she was learning to become a real christian, to resign herself—to forgive—to trust in God. I knew that the evil struggle was over at last, that she did from her heart ask God to bless John Phillips and Salome when she spoke in that earnest reverent voice, and could look up with that lightening face. There was a tone in her pronunciation of the Holy Name which can never be misunderstood ; I felt that she realized how she was speaking of the Divine, of the God who had saved her !

“ How kind you are to me, I am sure you are the best, dearest sister in the world ! ” quoth little Salome.

“ Oh hush, dear, don’t, you cannot tell what I am—don’t— ” then, after a pause, “ Salome, dear, will you tell me that you forgive any harsh words I may ever have said to you, or harsh thoughts I may have indulged ; any trespass that I may have trespassed against you and against God ? ”

"Oh yes, dear," Salome seemed a little awed by the seriousness of Cecil's appeal, "but you have never been anything but kind to me, you are so good. John was only saying yesterday he did not know anyone whom he respected so much as you."

"Don't—don't," and Cecil absolutely groaned.

"Your head is bad I am afraid."

"No, it is not that; but I'll not keep you here, Salome dear, he'll be coming and wanting you. Will you tell him from me that I give you both my best wishes and prayers, that he and you have only to settle your own plans, and so far as I can, I will help you to carry them out."

Again a long loving embrace, and then Salome ran out into the passage. We could hear her singing as she went down stairs.

"My poor child!" I said involuntarily as the door closed; "but God will reward you,"

"No—no—not that, I deserve nothing! Oh, Mimi, shall I ever be able to blot out my past sin?"

“Not you, but Christ can and will; don’t you remember that verse: ‘Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool;’ and again the promise that, ‘When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive?’”

“Mimi, so long as I live I will, with God’s help, do my best to make happy the lives of those two.”

I bent down and said: “God bless you!” I knew that she promised in sincerity and truth. And so she afterwards proved that she had done.

She had erred indeed; she had gone astray from God’s fold like a lost sheep. Her passion and her despair had urged her on and tempted her to hold lightly that precious gift of life which is God’s loan, and therefore to be given up by none of His servants save

when His messenger—death—comes to reclaim it.

But if Cecil Claridge sinned, so also did she repent. It was not the repentance of a day, or a week, or a year; the constant humility of her present character has been built up on her penitence, and the past has flung a gravity and a warning over her whole life, such as no future years have the power to erase. Her old pride, haughtiness, and self-reliance have passed away. I think they did so in that hour when she first realized how depraved, how incompetent, how sinful she could be, when she put herself out of God's hand. Leastways I know that some salutary memory ever keeps her in check now; that no hasty word passes her lips, and no harsh judgment is even momentarily allowed ere she draws back and corrects herself with a stricken heart, thinking perhaps how little cause she has to convict or condemn others!

Do not, oh reader, think that I pass lightly

over the great sin which she was so nearly committing. Not for one moment would I disguise its heinousness and guilt. If I could describe to you the hours of dreadful remorse and anguish which over and over again darkened Cecil Claridge's after-life, you would see that I, at any rate, have no cause to say that punishment does not follow on even a thought of sin.

Dearly as I love my charge, I offer no extenuation for her conduct on that day of trial. I might urge excuses on her behalf and bring forward the temptation that assailed her, the constitutional melancholy of her mind, which was aggravated by excitement. I might say that at the time there was almost a cloud over her reason. I might dwell on the months of suffering and uncertainty she had undergone, the shock she had received in learning her father's past wickedness and guilt—on George Vivian's death, and the discovery of her great error with regard to John Phillips—I might tell how that old legend concerning her race

had worked on her imaginative nature—I might—but I will not—I know there is explanation enough for our commission of any sin, even the most heinous, when we confess, “I forsook God’s way and trusted in an arm of flesh, He let me alone that by my fall I might prove my need of His protection!”

Cecil was laid up some days with a severe feverish attack, the very natural consequence of her overwrought feelings, and when she recovered, we removed to a sheltered watering place in the south, and there spent the winter months.

The marriage of John Phillips and Salome was easily and promptly arranged, and seemed to give satisfaction to the families of both parties. Cecil settled a handsome portion on her sister, and unceasingly interested herself in her happiness. John was ordained after Christmas and forthwith proceeded to his curacy, to begin his work, and

prepare a home for his bride. And, when the spring flowers were coming out, and the Burton grounds wore their fairest looks, we all came back to the Abbots, and there the wedding took place.

It was a very gay affair—so Cecil willed, and all the preparations were devised by her; perhaps she felt that a host of busy occupations would at that time best distract her thoughts from herself. Be that as it may, she never, by word or manner, testified to any latent sorrow or regret; not even to me. A suspicion of the truth, I am sure, never crossed the minds of either John Phillips or Salome, though both were overflowing with gratitude for Cecil's liberality and thoughtfulness. If it had not been for her, I do not think that we, soberminded and worldly-wise elders, could ever have permitted the marriage to take place when it did; John would, at any rate, have had to have waited for his promised living.

But Cecil, one by one, removed each

obstacle as it presented itself. She stood by the bride's side, when she promised "to love, honour, and obey" John Phillips, and did not shrink from the blessing which proclaimed to be man and wife, him to whom she had once directed her dearest hopes, and the little sister, to whom she had displayed unvarying tenderness, affection—and, at last, self-sacrifice.

After the bridal party had departed and the last guests were gone, she stole up to her own room and there I found her—praying. But she was rather praying for a blessing on John and Salome than for herself.

God can bring good out of evil, and I think that perhaps my darling's momentary fall was permitted, that she might be humbled by self knowledge, and sanctified by the grace of a reconciled God.

BOOK IV.

CONCLUSION.

"Passing through Nature to Eternity."

SHAKESPEARE.

"He who takes conscience for his guide, will not easily lose his way."

"A good conscience is better than two witnesses : it will consume your grief as the sun dissolves ice. It is a spring when you are thirsty, a staff when you are weary, a screen when the sun burns you, a pillow in death."

ZHENAG.

"The trivial round, the common task,
Would finish all we ought to ask ;
Room to deny ourselves; a road
To bring us, daily, nearer God."

KEBLE.

TIME has again sped on and brought its manifold changes. A woman of nigh-hand three-score years, I stand again on the threshold of the old Abbots.

It is a spring day, the first swallows are swooping through the air, and a blackbird sings joyously amongst the laurels. The lilacs and double-blossomed cherries are in full bloom, brightening and perfuming the old fashioned garden; the trim beds have a fair show of narcissuses, wallflowers, polyanthuses and auriculas, upon which the cheery May-day sun streams down with a warm smile.

On the broad, sheltered terrace, I see several figures—an old infirm woman leaning on the shoulder of a young girl; a couple of invalids reclining in pillowed chairs; two middle-aged ladies walking together and conversing; a third reading on the bench below the yew tree; while others are scattered in all directions through the grounds.

These are Cecil Claridge's pensioners, the reduced gentlewomen for whom her mother long ago designed a Refuge, and for whom, in these later years, she has made a happy home. The Abbots is given up for the furtherance of this good work; the property, long time ago

forcibly alienated from God's service, has been restored to it; Cecil Claridge has voluntarily resigned her Burton estate for the endowment of this establishment, which also comprises an orphanage for the fortuneless children of the middle class.

I have the superintendence of the Ladies' Home. Mrs. Evans is the head of the orphanage, and now, surrounded by her fair, healthy children, and relieved from all anxiety about their present and future, she has grown a placid, happy looking woman; the careworn expression has passed from her face, and she is one of the blithest, most energetic workers in the Abbots. She watches by every bed of sickness, when any are in sorrow or trial, they resort to her and ask her counsel and sympathy; she has toiled and suffered herself, and therefore is loving and pitiful to others. The little children gather round her in the winter evenings, laying their curly heads on her lap, just as her own little ones were wont to do.

See, her youngest, the little Edith who was our companion at Redcar, is standing at my side now, a well-grown, rosy cheeked maiden of eleven years, and the bunch of cowslips, which she is pressing into my hand, is designed for Miss Claridge, the dear friend of every child in the house. I am to take the flowers to Cecil with Edith's love!

I am going home now—how strange to apply the term to any place but the Abbots! But the Abbots is our home no longer; it is rather the home of those who walk along the terrace, of the children who at play in the shrubbery make the air to resound with their glad young voices.

Our little pony carriage waits for me, and I step into it and drive down the lime avenue. The woman at the lodge comes out to open me the gate and to curtsy to me as I pass; and so I go along the familiar lanes and enter the village.

Here, at any rate, is a change for the better; the village evidences Cecil's good work

even more than any other portion of the estate. Those trim, substantial cottages were built for her labourers; the parallel street, with its neat, uniform houses, is inhabited by the miners who are employed in the ironstone workings on the Redheugh property. Our handsome new church cost a fortune in itself, and may well be the pride of the country side; its rich endowment, like that of the Ladies' Home, has been provided by the rent-roll of the Abbots. The Vicarage corresponds with the Church, and is a gothic building of freestone, with more handsome proportions than one would expect to find in a village like Burton. But when Cecil built it she had an eye to her sister's comfort, and the constantly increasing numbers of that sister's family. For, as you have already surmised, dear reader, John Phillips is the Vicar of Burton. Cecil gave the living to Salome's husband some five years ago, on the death of the old incumbent. There is a curate, too, for the church's work in Burton is

too arduous for the compass of one man's powers—strong, zealous and active though he might be. Mr. Charles Egerton is the name of the curate, and he is scarcely less beloved in the place than is his vicar. The two work hand in hand, and are earnest friends.

Now I have passed the church—passed the one little grave in the new churchyard in which I feel an especial interest, the mound marked by that white headstone on which is carved the name of *Ruth Evans*. She died two years ago, having by her patient endurance of trouble and sickness, taught us such good lessons as I trust we may never forget.

I am opposite the Vicarage gate, but I do not linger there; the drawing-room sashes are wide open, and through one of them the white blind is flapping noisily. At the nursery window above there is a young nurse holding a baby. She sees me, and makes the unconscious child kiss its little hand to me.

I am going on, for I have still a drive of some distance before me. I am going home

to Redheugh. There—I reach it at last. I turn in by the new white lodge, pass the plantation of larches, which Cecil watches so anxiously, pass through the newly-enclosed park, go slowly up the hill. A few handsome old trees are scattered about here, and now we are at the house, at the Redheugh Hall, which Mr. Claridge planned with such elaborate care before his wife's death. It is a splendid pile of building, and years hence, if I live so long, when time shall have mellowed its tones, and associations have gathered round the place, I may gain an attachment for it. As it is, my thoughts invariably revert to the Abbots when I speak of *home*.

I go in. There is a cosy little room, looking out in the flower garden, which Cecil loves best to occupy, and probably I shall find her there.

I am right. Sitting beside the arm-chair, wherein reclines an old man with snow-white hair; a boy of six years old leaning against her lap to look at the pictures which

she is pointing out in the big Bible, to listen to the story which she is telling of the Holy Babe who was born in the manger at Bethlehem, and the angels who announced His birth, is Cecil Claridge, my dear charge.

She lifts her eyes when I come in, and smiles, and I smile in answer.

Of course she wants to hear all the news from the Abbots, but her imperious god-child—her second John Phillips on the one side, and the old man on the other, who, despite his furrowed brow and dim eyes, has a strange childishness and impatience of manner, call to her to go on, and merely for the gratification of her own curiosity she will not say them nay. She goes on with the good story of old and I sit down patiently and listen too.

The child is interested and interrupts her with many enquiries, pointing with his little finger to the pictures; and eagerly, too, bends forward the old bent man, asking no questions indeed, but listening to the story as though he understood and enjoyed it, anxious to see

the pictures, smiling when the child smiles, and looking from time to time with a pleased fond look at Cecil herself.

This is the once handsome, selfish, cruel-minded Edward Claridge, by trouble, suffering, and primarily by God's mercy, reduced to harmless imbecility ; to the childishness of mind and heart, which obliterating all the evil lessons he had learnt from the world, is restoring to him the first fresh, innocent pleasures he had enjoyed at his mother's knee. Salome's little children are his almost daily playfellows ; Cecil's Bible stories and Scripture prints are his greatest delight. Morning and night he repeats a child's prayer, kneeling by Cecil's side, and when he moves about he always wants to hold her hand ; he seems to depend upon her for everything, and when she is out of his sight, he is miserable.

It is a great and arduous charge for her, and I often feel anxious lest it should prove too much for her strength. But she is grown much stronger in these days, and she never

complains. I believe that now the duty has become even more than an interest to her, almost a pleasure.

She will feel a sad blank in her life when the old man dies, and in his broken health it is scarcely likely that he will live long. How tenderly she cares for him, serves him, nurses him, surely her devotion must win for her that blessing of heaven, promised to those who honour their father and mother.

If there was a curse on her, which I can scarcely believe, though her imaginative nature gave such full credence to the legend, it is removed now. The church has once again the tithes of which that blood-stained Rupert de Claridge deprived it. His descendants dwell no longer in the old Abbots, instead it is a refuge and a shelter for the needy. Cecil Claridge was thought to make a great and very unnecessary sacrifice; many of the worldly-wise laughed at her, some called her a fool, some a fanatic; but it does not seem to me that, even in a worldly-wise light she

has been any sufferer by her generosity. God blesses the perpetrator of a good deed; He heaps the garners of those who turn not away the gleaners from their fields, the presses of those who deal forth oil and wine to the sick and suffering.

Cecil is even a richer woman at Redheugh than she had been at Burton. To be sure she gave up the Abbots property, but from the day she did so the ironstone at Redheugh proved more and more remunerative; she took good care of the spiritual and temporal wants of those who served her, and their prayers called down blessings upon her head, and their gratitude shone forth in her service.

Be assured that no money is dispensed in God's work, but a rich interest comes home to ourselves; perhaps even the grass grows richer in our pastures, the kine fatten more rapidly, the grain is more safely housed, when for God's sake we have taken thought as well for those who labour for us, and their

needs, spiritual and temporal, as for our actual farms or estates—for the grain of God's Word in the world, as well as for the seed in our furrows.

As certainly as 'an evil deed never prospers, even in this world, so does a good act bring forth its abundant fruit, either here or in the life to come.

Cecil did not lay aside her occupation, till a second opening of the door admitted her sister Salome and John Phillips, who had walked hither by the fields in order to take their little boy home with them. Then Johnnie running to greet his parents, and the old man's attention being attracted to the new comers, she could move the Bible on to the side table, where it usually stood, and go forward to greet her guests.

What a change seven years has made in Salome! She has lost her pretty, slight figure, and though still a very lovely woman, is inclined to embonpoint, and pays very little attention to her dress. Her every thought seems

engrossed in her children and John, and the wants of the sick people in the village. There is little fear of her being thoughtless, careless, or given to flirtation in these days; she cares very little about going into society, and has no longer any thirst for admiration. John is her *pope*, and so long as he is pleased with the children's clean hands and good behaviour, and dinner is served at the proper hour, and without any misfortune to the pudding or potatoes, from the incapacity of the cook, so long as baby cuts his teeth nicely, and the small Cecil gets over the measles, she cares for little else in the world.

Just to fancy that there ever could have been a possibility of this homely, motherly woman being a Duchess! I laugh now as I think of my past terror; I smile as I picture Salome what she used to be, and fancy I see Lord John Rayleigh hovering about her as he used to do, seven years ago. I heard of Lord John the other day; he is Lord John Rayleigh still, for to everyone's surprise, his

sickly brother recovered his health, married the daughter of a neighbouring peer, and now no end of lordling nephews shut out our friend from the succession on which he had so confidently reckoned. To make the matter better or worse, as the case may be, he is a married man himself, and there is more than one baby in the Coignenton Nursery, and their mother, Lord John's wife, is that Honorable Miss Smythe, with whom he flirted so desperately at the commencement of our acquaintance; about his conduct to whom, Salome must, from her own telling, have so unmercifully reproached him, when she refused him herself. Well, what things do come about, to be sure!

Susan Egerton is married; her husband was a clergyman friend of her brother Charlie's. Old Mr. Egerton is dead, and his eldest son and his wife are living at Torrehill. Mrs. Egerton, the widow, and her daughter Louie, are sunning themselves in the fashionable atmosphere of a southern watering-place,

where Louie strives to come out as a belle, and where her brother Leopold has already made himself unpleasantly conspicuous and ridiculous in more ways than one; report says that the *home* of these three, is by no means a peaceful or happy one.

But to go back to the pleasanter topic of "my child Cecil." She has greatly improved in both manner and appearance, and at eight-and-twenty is a more comely and agreeable woman than she was seven years ago. And too, there is now written in her countenance, what has ever been lacking there hitherto, the expression of a happy and tranquil spirit, that something indescribable which testifies to the peace in which those are kept, whose minds are stayed on God.

Who, now a days, could call Cecil Claridge a saddened, a disappointed, or even an anxious woman? Listen to her joyous laughter, her hearty tones; see how she caresses little Johnnie when he clings round her to say good-bye; look how she smiles at Salome,

and with what unrestrained cordiality she answers the remarks of John Phillips.

The transient fever of her life has passed away; she is an earnest, working, human creature, full of genuine love and charity to her fellow men. John Phillips is no longer a hero in her eyes. How could he be when she sees him hour after hour in his own home, and meets face to face the infirmities of human nature, which he shares in common with mankind? Has she not heard him speak sharply even to his own Salome, be irritable and impatient with the children, say things he had better have left unsaid, do things he had better have left undone? Does she not know that he can be sometimes over zealous and impolitic in the performance of his duty, sometimes self-opinionated about the manner of its execution, perverse, intractable, even sarcastic? No man is perfect, at least only in the eyes of his wife or his lover, and Cecil stands in neither of these capacities to John Phillips.

I smile to myself when I recall something like a comedy which I once witnessed. It was during the first visit Cecil and I paid to Salome, some time after her marriage; the leg of mutton at dinner proved insufficiently roasted and John stormed—stormed across the table at his poor little wife! I wish you could have seen Cecil's face. Not many months ago this man had been her standard of perfection!

Well, undoubtedly he was and is very good, he makes Salome an excellent husband and she is very happy with him. But I don't think that now-a-days Cecil would care to change places with her.

Many of the village people contrast Mr. Phillips unfavourably with his curate, Mr. Egerton, and once or twice lately I have heard Cecil very nearly doing the same. Only yesterday she said to me, referring to some disagreement between the Vicar and a parish-ioner:

"I wish John had a little more of Charlie's

forbearance, and then he would not so often get himself into hot water."

Reader, I am not throwing out any hints, don't fancy so, I leave all the rest to your own taste and imagination. I only say that Cecil is at last a happy, contented, and really useful woman. Religion is no longer to her a beautiful theory, but rather a faith—a hope—and so whatever her life may be, and she is young enough to know many changes and many blessings yet, we may leave her with a tranquil heart, for she is in God's Hands!

THE END.

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